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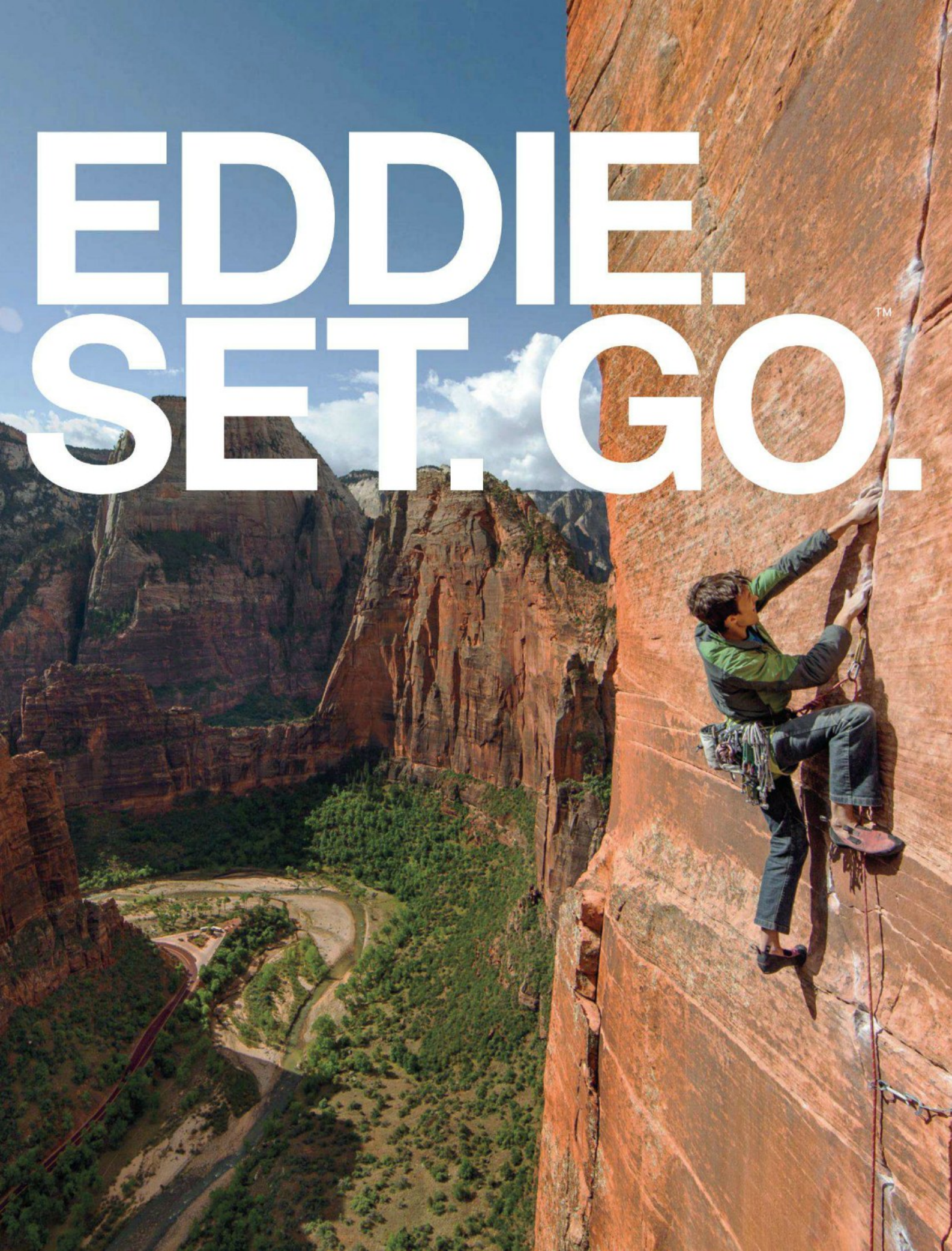
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LIVE YOUR ADVENTURE

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[NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC TRAVELER]

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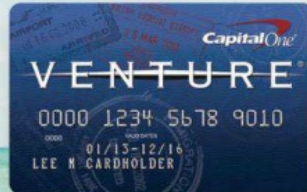
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This spring, award-winning adventure photographer **TIM KEMPLE** traveled to southern Iceland's rugged national parks, hiking trails, beaches, and glaciers to test the new Olympus Tough Series. While there, the epic landscapes were pummeled by sudden extreme weather changes, making a waterproof, freezeproof, shockproof, and crushproof camera essential. Here Kemple shares how he got these photos.

{ ALL IMAGES WERE TAKEN WITH THE OLYMPUS TOUGH. }

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TRAIL RUNNING LAKI LAVA FIELDS, ICELAND

On this day ultra-runner Rory Bosio and I encountered rain and wind—but that was perfect for the images I wanted to capture. The rain had turned the moss an electric green, the waterfalls were raging in the distance, and the passing fog created another layer of depth in the imagery that was unique. And there was nobody on the trails for miles!



BOULDERING IN THÓRSMÖRK, ICELAND

We had heard rumors of bouldering potential in a particular spot in Thórs mörk, or "Thor's Forest," a beautiful valley below Iceland's southern volcanic mountains. Once we found it, I started looking for an angle that allowed the climber, Blake Hendrix, to pop from the frame and show the depth of the landscape. To create a layer in the foreground that guides the eye to the subject, I had to lay the camera in the damp moss.



EXPLORING AN ICE CAVE, EYJAFJALLAJÖKULL, ICELAND

After a day of adventuring, we turned one last corner and saw a small river pouring out of a glacier. It created this giant cave at its base. We were like kids and just ran full-speed to explore the cave. It was cold inside and water was dripping everywhere. When I made it to the back of the cave, I turned and saw Rory Bosio reaching for the natural water flow. Luckily I had my camera in my pocket, and I was able to snap a couple of candid moments.

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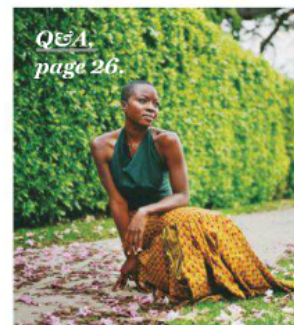
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Sistine Chapel

ON THE COVER: New Zealand's Fiordland, by Mark Meredith/ScribblesNZ



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JODI HILTON (GALLERY); SOPHIA 203 (SANDALS); REINER RIEDER/REDUX (CITY SCENE); JESSICA SAMPLE (WOMAN)

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[EDITOR'S NOTE]

Hit the Road

IT'S A BREEZY SATURDAY AFTERNOON, and I'm exploring the spiderweb of back roads on Maryland's Eastern Shore. I'm in my green 1972 MGB, with the top down and the CD player roaring. From my 12-inches-above-the-tarmac perch, I experience an exhilaration of movement and acuity of vision that more ordinary forms of locomotion rarely allow. Taking to the road has always been a comfort and an escape for me. It began with long trips in the family Rambler from Montreal to Cape Cod, a marathon of breakdowns and games of count the license plates. Then came spontaneous road odysseys with my college buddies to wherever seemed good at the time. Since then I have hairpinned on the Tail of the Dragon (11 miles, 318 curves) between Tennessee and North Carolina. Driven California's breathtaking Highway 1 through Big Sur. Ridden the terrifying roads of India's countryside, missing cows and pedestrians by fractions of an inch. For me, a road trip, with its detours and inevitable serendipities, is the best way to connect with both place and people. It often gives us some of our most enduring memories. Over drinks one night recently, the novelist and grand traveler Paul Theroux talked about his relationship with the road. "My most memorable road trip was when I drove through Malawi, Zambia, Tanzania, and Kenya to Uganda in 1965—about 2,000 miles of dirt roads. There were lions in the road. Maasai warriors. Roadblocks. Nothing can compare with that." The trip he wants to take now? "Straight north from my house in Massachusetts, up through New England and Quebec, until I run out of road." I still harbor dreams of roads not yet taken—such as the world-class journeys we feature on [page 58](#). —KEITH BELLOWES

[FOREIGN DESK]

THE BUZZ IN BUCHAREST

Romania's capital once was known as the "Paris of the Balkans" for its mix of period architecture. Domnica Macri, an editor with our Romania edition, shares her suggestions for ultimate Bucharest experiences.

MUSICAL CITY

One of eastern Europe's biggest music events, the biennial **George Enescu Festival** will take hold of Bucharest this September with performances by world-class artists and orchestras. Particularly enjoyable are the open-air concerts, which somehow manage to eclipse the din of the traffic.



A REAL MUST

Hanul Manuc, a restored 19th-century inn (above), has long been a popular Bucharest dining spot. What to order? If it's fall, try a glass of must-fermented grape juice—and a platter of Romanian cheeses.

CULTURE HUB

Once you've wandered in, it's hard to leave the multilevel **Cărturești** bookshop. All sorts of nooks and corners—in the children's room, in the attic, in the garden café, in the basement bar—invite reading and lingering... for hours.

SECRET GARDEN

In the middle of Bucharest, near Popa Rusu Baptist Church, sits my favorite tearoom, **Ceai la Metoc**. It's so secluded that I missed it once. But sitting at one of its tables under fig trees makes for an almost ecstatic experience.

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Ish Davis (right) obliges in a cross-cultural photo op at the Bird's Nest stadium in Beijing.

Beyond Skin Deep

A RECENT POST on our Intelligent Travel blog about a black family's experience traveling in China sparked discussion. Blogger Heather Greenwood Davis—aka the Globetrotting Mama, whose family was recognized in our debut “Travelers of the Year” feature (December 2012/January 2013)—shared how she and her husband, Ish, turned the frustration of being gawked at and photographed into a teachable moment for their two sons. Readers chimed in with similar tales—as well as tips on handling unsolicited attention while abroad. “I am living in the Middle East with my multiracial daughter, and her hair is touched quite a bit,” commented one reader. “Arab adults will pat her cheeks in

an endearing way, which I learned is cultural—it's a sign of love for children.”

Carolyn B. Heller of **Vancouver, British Columbia**, found one benefit of the extra attention her identical twin daughters attracted in China—social capital. “We had a train carload of instant friends on an overnight

journey to Dalian, and we spent a day at Changbai Shan hiking with a group of teachers. While my kids didn't always relish the attention, they now say China is the friendliest place they've been.”

Jessica Betz of Chengdu, China, by way of **Oklahoma City**, got an unexpected lesson in rural Chinese lore:

“Apparently there is mythology that red-haired people are ghosts. That might explain one woman's reaction to me—she gasped and left quickly.” That's a good reason to make learning about local customs a priority, as another reader pointed out: “Knowing it is customary for locals to touch hair and pinch faces would have prepared you for what to expect.” And Alicia Akins of **Louangphrabang, Laos**, whose experience was similar to the Davis family's, wrote in favor of encouraging curiosity. “Over the three years I lived in China, I knew I was likely the first black person some people had seen and felt a responsibility to represent others well. I struggled with the ‘rudeness’ of it all until I realized that if I saw a purple person, I'd probably stare, too.”

Many other readers drew positive conclusions as well. “As we see and experience different people, cultures, and customs, we grow in our understanding and tolerance,”

wrote Flora Morris Brown of **Anaheim, Calif.**, and Amanda Vopel of **Basel, Switzerland**, pushed the point further, writing, “Let's savor our travel experiences—and celebrate our uniqueness.”

THINK LOCAL For the eighth year we presented our “Tours of a Lifetime” showcase of the world's best guided trips (“The Year of Exploration,” May 2013). Olof Hansen of **San Francisco** wrote in to remind us of the value of short (often free) tours led by locals. “I give free walking tours through the Castro neighborhood, and whenever I travel I seek out similar guides—I've been on the Chicago Architecture Foundation's boat tour on the Chicago River, a walk led by volunteers in Amsterdam, and a tour of the Stasi prison in Berlin by a former inmate. Great stories, unique experiences.”

GRAND TOURING To celebrate National Geographic's 125th anniversary, May's “Tours of a Lifetime” favored trips with a spirit of exploration. We also asked readers which travel frontiers they'd like to push. The responses ranged from the exotic to the cosmic (“Mars, anyone?”):

“Since reading the chronicles of Captain Cook as a child, I've been intrigued by islands—their sense of isolation and serenity, and who doesn't love island people?” wrote Ehab Jaleel of **Roswell, Ga.** “I dream of visiting Zanzibar and Comoros, and wonder how being located along sea trade routes between Africa, Arabia, and India must have influenced their cultures.” Meanwhile Michele Weir of **Naples, Fla.**, has Egypt on her mind: “I'm an amateur Egyptologist and would die happy if I could spend a few months there exploring the historic sights and the Cairo Museum.”

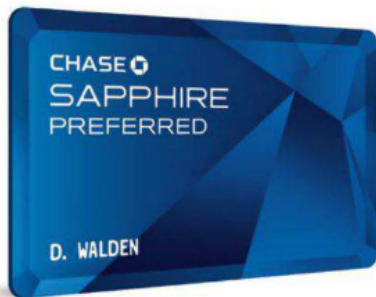
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See Iceland through their eyes



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Melford, Palani Mohan, Chris Rainier, Jim Richardson,
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PUBLICIST Heather Wyatt

ngrtraveler@hwyattpr.com; 212-610-5535

MARKET RESEARCH MANAGER Tracy Hamilton Stone

DIGITAL MEDIA VICE PRESIDENT, TRAVEL

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tabraham@ngs.org; Hilary Halstead hhalstea@ngs.org;

Doug Harrison doharris@ngs.org; Kathleen Kertesz

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TRAVEL DIRECTORY MANAGER Laura Robertson

larobert@ngs.org

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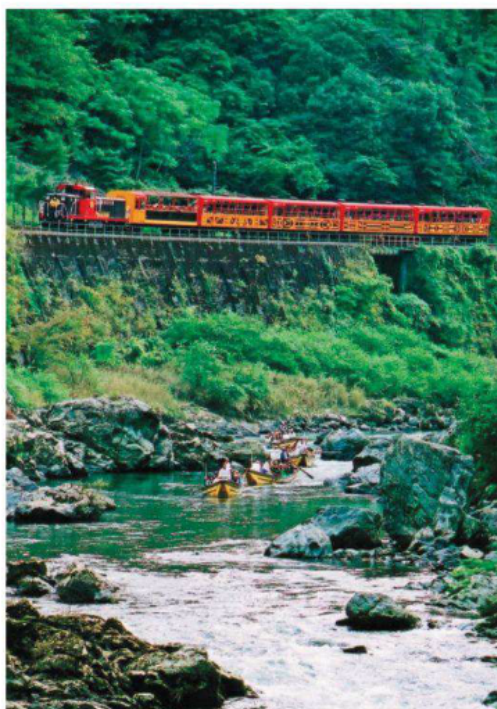
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National Geographic Traveler's Digital Nomad Andrew Evans recommends this ten-day Japan Rail journey of unique destinations, packed with amazing experiences that you'll find—**only in Japan**.

Day 1 Take the Shinkansen from Tokyo to Kyoto. Explore the beauty of Japan's ancient capital—admire the Temple of the Golden Pavilion and painted screens of Taizoin, then spend the night at the Shunko-In Buddhist Temple's guesthouse.

Day 2 Absorb another full day of Kyoto splendors, enjoy the intricate rock gardens, taste *shōjin-ryōri* (vegetarian) cuisine, learn calligraphy, and practice Zen meditation from actual Buddhist monks. For inspiring views, take the sightseeing tram in nearby Sagano.

Days 3-4 Ride to Gifu and see the city's namesake butterflies at the Nawa Insect Museum. Then, hike (or ride) to the top of leafy Mount Kinka. For a spontaneous side trip, jump off the train in Otsu, on the way from Kyoto to Gifu, for a view of Lake Biwa,

the largest lake in Japan. Admire the glowing colored fountain and meander through the silent forest gardens of Homyoin Temple.

Days 5-6 Arrive at Takayama and start with the famous farmers market. Step 130 years back in time at the Kusakabe House, walk the castle ruins, soak in an outdoor *onsen* (hot spring), enjoy the misty Japanese Alps, then relax at a traditional *ryokan* (inn). Before leaving town, order Takayama's specialty for the road—a *Hoba Miso* bento box with miso, leeks, shiitakes, and pickles wrapped in magnolia leaf, then chargrilled.

Days 7-8 Ride up to the mountain city of Nagano, tour the 1,400-year-old *Zenkō-ji* temples, and sample *oyaki* dumplings. The next morning, visit Jigokudani Monkey Park and meet Japan's only hot-spring-bathing snow monkeys. In the afternoon, ride the Shinkansen to historic Tokyo Station, passing Mount Fuji along the way.

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Photos: Tokyo Train Station (top left); Shinkansen passing Mount Fuji (lower left); Sagano sightseeing tram and Hozugawa River in Kyoto (center); miso shop in Takayama (top right).

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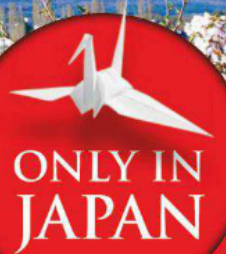
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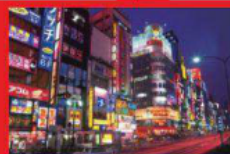
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SMART

TRAVELER

THE PLACE

Racing to the Bay

THIS SEPTEMBER 7-21 the global sailing community will navigate to San Francisco for the finals of the America's Cup, which returns to the U.S. after 18 years overseas. For a soaring race view, cross the Golden Gate Bridge to **Sausalito**, a hideaway of houseboating free spirits and high-tech high rollers. From the deck at the Trident and other bay-front restaurants, photo ops are framed by Alcatraz, the terra-cotta roofs of the Presidio, and the Transamerica Pyramid. Art galleries, cafés, and shops beckon, while railcar turned museum Ice House chronicles Sausalito's evolution from Miwok Indian settlement and bawdy seafarers' village to enclave for bootleggers and bohemians. No matter who takes the trophy, locals bet on Copita for sidewalk tables, quesadillas, and the Oaxacan chocolate shake—a different kind of winning cup. —DON GEORGE

Hillside homes in Sausalito overlook the San Francisco skyline.



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THE BUY

Subcontinent Style

FROM GEM cutters to weavers, artisans have long been synonymous with India's Pink City, but **Jaipur's craft heritage** continues to evolve. In recent years, Western designers have immigrated here and are learning from and employing skilled locals. Swedish-born Sophia Edstrand discovered the centuries-old *zardozi* embroidery technique while wandering the city's bazaars and now works with artisans to make silk necklaces and accessories with nature motifs such as peonies and butterflies. Edstrand sells at Colette and Le Bon Marché in Paris, as well as at her pint-size Jaipur atelier. At Frenchman Thierry Journo's shop, Idli Design, in the Civil Lines neighborhood, lamps come in rich colors (above), and shawls and tunics are tie-dyed in the regional tradition of *bandhani*. Homegrown talent is also on the rise, including furniture designer Ayush Kasliwal, who can recount the story behind each object at his studio, from a wood-and-brass coffee table to a stool made from recycled bicycle tire rims and old signboards. Kasliwal is helping indigenous communities keep local styles of brass and woodwork alive. "We make things that have utility, that speak of the past, but with relevance today," he says. —TANVI CHHEDA



Shopkeepers unfurl colorful saris for potential buyers in Jaipur.



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THE TASTE

Volcano Wine

SOON AFTER arriving in the Azores in the 1430s and digging into the rich volcanic soil, Portuguese settlers planted Verdelho wine grapes. Six centuries on, travelers are increasingly exploring the **vineyards of the Azores**, especially Pico Island (the archipelago's second largest) with a landscape so intricate and unusual UNESCO declared it a World Heritage site. Five-foot-tall stone walls delineate grape plots (*currais*) roughly the size of tennis courts. "You drill a hole in the volcanic crust to plant the grapes," explains Azores wine guru Joaquim Coutinho Costa. "We call it volcano wine."

Along Pico's Azores Adeliçor, a burgeoning wine loop to and from the town of Madalena, tourists enjoy low-key encounters—Napa Valley circa 50 years ago—at spots like Adega da Buraca, with a tasting room and demos of traditional wicker and wool crafts. During September's Pico harvest festival, visitors join grape pickers in the fields, and October 25-27, a food fest pairs Azores wines with local cheese, fish, and meats. —Joe Yogerst



Pico harvest.



An aerial photograph capturing the rugged coastline of São Lourenço on the Azores island of Santa Maria. The image shows a steep, green cliffside with numerous terraced vineyards that descend towards the sea. A small cluster of white buildings with red-tiled roofs is nestled at the base of the cliff. The ocean is a deep blue, with white-capped waves crashing against the shore, creating a dynamic contrast with the dark sand and rocks. The sky is a clear, pale blue.

*Fenced grape
plots distinguish
the coast of São
Lourenço, on the
Azores island of
Santa Maria.*

THE NEIGHBORHOOD

Edge of the Bosphorus

AT THE MOUTH of the Golden Horn, Istanbul's **Karaköy** has bustled with trade and commerce since the Byzantine era. Long overlooked by tourists and developers because of a trifecta of fish stalls, hardware stores, and brothels, the waterfront district these days is abuzz with newcomers, from galleries to top-notch restaurants. Yet fishermen continue to hawk *hamsi* (anchovies) at the market, and mechanics still flock here for supplies. With rents skyrocketing, that workaday grit won't last. For now, though, Karaköy epitomizes a changing Istanbul, which has recently undergone episodes of isolated unrest.

1 Istanbul Modern In a renovated 1950s warehouse, Istanbul's first major contemporary art museum offers views across the Bosphorus as well as a collection of artists such as Mark Bradford and Princess Fahrelnissa Zeid, whose abstract paintings

blend Byzantine, Ottoman, and Western influences.

2 Kılıç Ali Paşa Hammam Designed by 16th-century architect Mimar Sinan, this Turkish bath reopened last year after a seven-year

restoration that resurrected original details and added marble massage rooms. Post-bath, relax with a sherbet under the sunlit dome.

3 Galata Simitçisi The sesame-encrusted *simit*—a

distant cousin of the bagel—is a favorite street snack of locals. In-the-know vendors source from this one-room bakery with a brick oven.

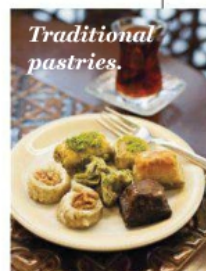
4 Karaköy Güllüoğlu Istanbul's most beloved (and, some say, oldest) baklava shop offers a primer on pastries, from pistachio rolls to *ceviz bursa* (walnut bites). Geometric-tiled flooring evokes Ottoman style.

5 Selda Okutan Gallery This stark showroom presents contemporary jewelry by six Turkish designers. In the back workshop, owner Okutan creates whimsical pieces, such as an exquisitely detailed brooch in the shape of an ant.

6 Lab: Istanbul Along the "French passage," a historic arcade, this shop stocks quirky items by local designers, like shirts with shredded hems, as well as a covetable selection of vintage sunglasses (Emmanuelle Khanh, Dior).

7 Lokanta Maya Since its 2010 opening by famed chef Didem Şenol, this restaurant has become a top pick of the city's discerning eaters. The menu changes frequently, but specialties include juicy *köfte* (meatballs) with mung beans.

8 Istanbul '74 This cultural center organizes major exhibitions and free events, most notably "Ist. Fest" featuring talks and shows by such luminaries as Gore Vidal and Zaha Hadid. Now on view: an exhibit related to the Istanbul Biennial. —Amanda Ruggeri



Traditional pastries.



Outside a local café.

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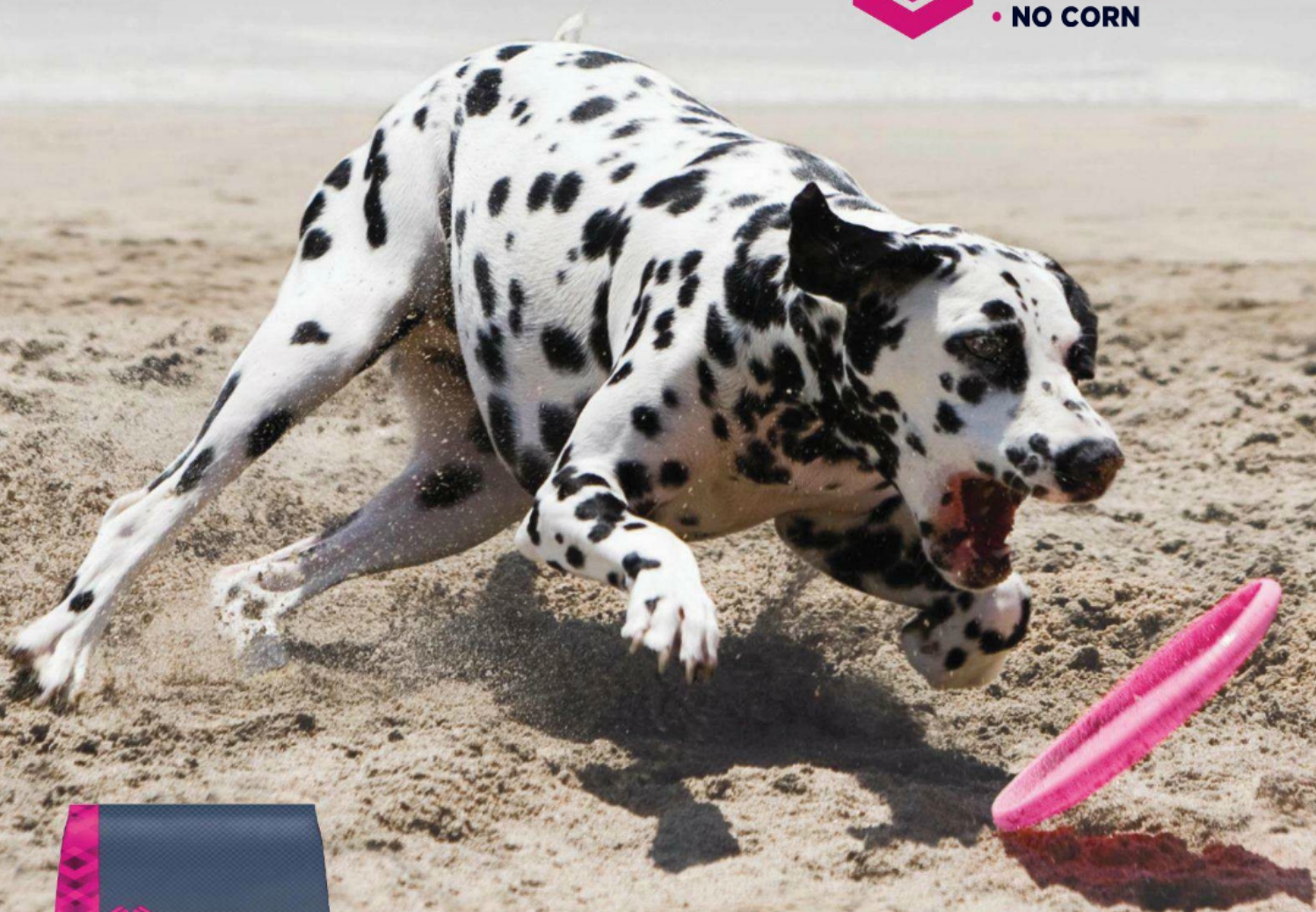
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EUKANUBA

THE ROUNDUP

Pitch-Perfect Museums



TENNESSEE

"Man in Black" pilgrims have a new mecca: Nashville's **Johnny Cash Museum** (20 miles from the home he shared with his wife, June), where items include his 12th-grade report card and tin cups from the Folsom Prison recording session.



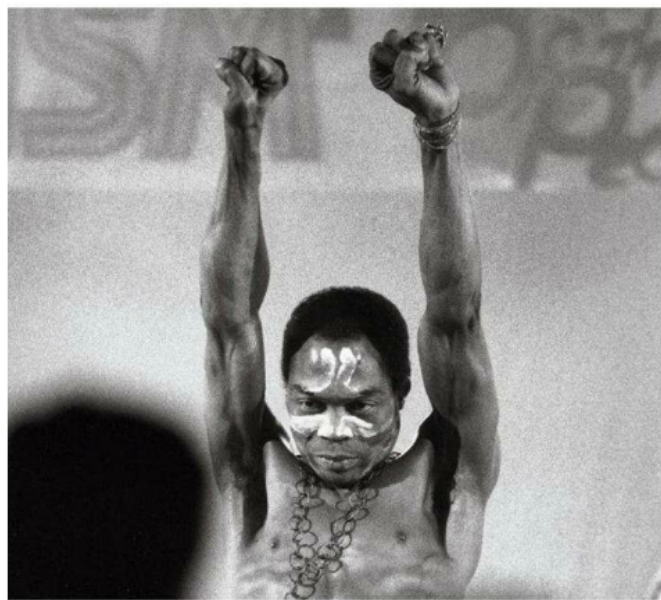
VIRGINIA

Winchester shunned native daughter Patsy Cline for years, but its **Museum of Shenandoah Valley** credits her beginnings in a major show opening August 30, near the tin-roofed home of the high school dropout turned country queen.



SWEDEN

Stockholm fetes its peppiest export with the recent launch of **Abba: The Museum**. Fans join holograms of the 1970s pop sensation on stage as "dancing queens," digitally dressed up in sequined jumpsuits and go-go boots.



NIGERIA

The **Kalakuta Museum** in Lagos honors Afrobeat king and activist Fela Kuti. Reopened last October as a museum and small hotel, the late star's house features his bedroom, a flashy shoe collection, and a rooftop bar. —Christine Bednarz

REMINDER: JOURNEYS START WITH A DESTINATION (remember to breathe)



THE PERSON

African Storyteller

RISING STAR **Danai Gurira** believes in the power of hybrids—her term for people who thrive at a confluence of cultures. The playwright and actress should know: Born in Iowa, raised in her parents' native Zimbabwe, trained in New York City, and now based in Los Angeles, she brings a layered perspective—and a rare spark—to her work. Accolades for her stage dramas set in colonial Africa include an Obie and a Global Tolerance Award, while her versatility takes the spotlight in screen roles that range from a Basotho immigrant in Brooklyn (*Mother of George*, a 2013 Sundance festival favorite) to a zombie slayer with a katana sword (AMC's *The Walking Dead*).

How does your background inform your worldview? My connection to the continent [of Africa] keeps my heart beating, and I have a sense of urgency about connecting the cultures. It upsets me when I see African stories used as backdrops, or made supplemental, which retains an idea of Africans as simple, moody, noble savages.

Any advice for travelers to Africa? The differences in experiences in Ghana or Liberia versus Zimbabwe are huge. Do a lot of research. Meet people from the place; let them guide you.

How can Westerners approach Africa with an open mind? Understand that you're functioning from privilege, not genius. Everyone has to go through a stage of development, their own Wild West.

What's special to you about Zimbabwe? Zimbabweans are interesting, powerful hybrids

of influences from the British and all over the world, plus our own. I learned discipline on the streets of Zimbabwe.

What are your must-sees in Zimbabwe? My family would vacation at Victoria Falls and the Hwange National Park area, an amazing place for safari. The Mana Pools hot

springs are gorgeous. The eastern highlands, including Bvumba, have beautiful lodges and some of the continent's best golf courses.

How has travel affected you? Going to Liberia, which was ravaged by war and barely has any infrastructure, was transformative. A group of women

told me stories that changed and humbled me. I'm an extension of them; I have no excuse to rest on my laurels.

What instincts do you draw on when you travel? I have an awareness of what to be wary of. You have to be a couple of steps ahead, especially as a woman. —Katie Knorovsky



Playwright and actress Danai Gurira says the vegetation of L.A. reminds her of Zimbabwe.



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on America's
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FRANS LANTING

Minerva Terrace,
Yellowstone National Park

I FIRST DISCOVERED America's national parks when I came to the United States one summer in the 1970s to hitchhike around the country. The wilderness experience of backpacking in places like **YOSEMITE** and the **GRAND CANYON** changed my life. I was a student from Holland, where it is impossible to find nature on such a grand scale. That summer I also discovered the photographs of those parks by great American photographers like Ansel Adams and Galen Rowell, and that inspired me to pick up a camera. I could never have dreamed that one day I would be privileged to celebrate so many parks in Hawaii, Alaska, and the West myself as a photographer for National Geographic. One day I was on assignment in **YELLOWSTONE** to capture the wonder of one of its amazing hot springs. Steam rose above **MINERVA TERRACE**, a place that takes you back to an earlier time on Earth. It's a primeval world preserved forever—and for everyone.

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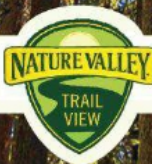
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DAISANN McLANE

Going Lowbrow, and Loving It

RAT-A-TAT-TAT! A skinny guy raps hard and fast on the outside of the taxi window to get my attention. Not an easy thing: It's cacophony city here, in Ciudad del Este, Paraguay, a Wild West town that straddles the borders of three South American nations. The skyline is the color of dust, and we're mired in a traffic sludge of trucks, cars, and people. Cart-pushing pedestrians yell "Watch out!" in Spanish and Portuguese as they weave through the crowds, balancing teetering towers of boxed cigarettes and cases of whiskey and beer like acrobats. ¶ Ciudad del Este is one of the world's most notorious smuggling hubs. It also happens

to be just a few miles from one of the hemisphere's most jaw-dropping attractions, the reason I have come to this part of the world: Iguazú Falls. After two days of tromping, spray-soaked, around the edges of cliffs thundering with white water, however, I'd become itchy for a different kind of adventure. So I set out from Argentina's side of the falls at 8 a.m. in a taxi, passed briefly through Brazil (where at 8:30 a.m. there wasn't a soul to check my visa), then crossed a short bridge into Paraguay, where I was only a little surprised to encounter no immigration check.

At first I don't see what the skinny guy is trying to sell; I figure it's the usual stuff offered in traffic jams around the world—a cold bottle of water, fruit, a newspaper. But then he smiles at me, gap-toothed, and holds up his offering for my inspection: a fire extinguisher.

Huh? "It fell off the back of a truck, of course, and it's probably empty," snorts Pablo, the beefy taxi driver I hired in Puerto Iguazú, Argentina, to take me on this three-nations-in-one-morning loop. "*Todo lo que quiera*—anything you want, and lots of things you don't want, you can find for sale in this town," he says.

I may be the only person crossing the border into Ciudad del Este who isn't here to buy or sell stuff on the sly. Instead, I'm chasing something else: the fun of lowbrow travel.

Our travel wish lists generally begin with the highbrow—places and things considered beautiful. We steer toward destinations that

promise sublime sights. In places where beauty is negligible, we dig to find the gems: a neighborhood of traditional shopkeepers, artisans, and hand-built houses, or a culture that has finely tuned aesthetics in clothing, dance, religion, or cuisine.

Eventually, saturation sets in. I've found that if I experience too much of the staggeringly stunning, my threshold for awesome goes up and up until the inevitable happens: I lose all ability to really see it. (My shorthand label for this moment is: Angkor Wat, day four.) When that burnout sets in, I know it's time to take a break and head for the less refined side of the place I'm in. When the going gets tough, the tough go looking for a karaoke bar. In Vegas.

Or, even better—Macau, Las Vegas's Asian cousin, where high rollers glug tea instead of beer and pop coins into beeping slots emblazoned with local themes such as "Enter the Dragon." I live in nearby Hong Kong, so when a friend visited some years ago, I played tour guide and dragged her through the highlights of Macau's World Heritage circuit of colonial Portuguese architecture: hilltop mansions, 17th-century fortresses, cobblestoned streets. Finally, caked with sweat and grime, we hit our travel wall. Our next stop? The air-conditioned splendor of Macau's Grand Lisboa Casino.

We slipped, unnoticed, into a smoke-filled back room of baccarat

players. The gray-blue fog wasn't thick enough to veil the angry red scar on the cheek of a man at the table. Yelling out in Cantonese to the female dealer, he defiantly bent back the corner of his turned-down card.

"You're bad," the dealer cooed, trying to dissipate the tension. Then backup arrived: A pool of security guys rushed in, and for a moment I felt I'd entered a classic Chow Yun-Fat gangster movie.

When my friend and I reminisce about our trip to Macau, it's not the World Heritage architecture we talk about; it's the tension of that moment, the slap of the cards on the table, the guy with the scar.

That is the thing about lowbrow travel. When I first veered from the highbrow path, I was looking for diversion, a break from visual overload. And, I admit, for the subversive thrill of going where a traveler wasn't "supposed" to go. Yet I discovered so much more when I wandered neon-bright lanes in Tokyo's Kabukicho district, where young women in pink wigs and nurse uniforms giggled through megaphones at tipsy businessmen, and stopped in the Bangkok bar where a Thai "ladyboy" in flawless black eyeliner crooned love songs. The best travel happens when you open yourself to all human experience and activity, not just the "beautiful." Sometimes the lowbrow end of the spectrum is where your best travel memories are waiting.

The vendor won't give up: He keeps rapping on the taxi window and waving the red cylinder at me. Pablo shouts at him in Spanish. "Listen, this lady didn't come from America to buy a *maldito* fire extinguisher." No, I didn't. I came to visit the certifiably beautiful Iguazú Falls. But later, and forever, when I tell the story of this trip, I will begin it here, in Ciudad del Este. ■



Tokyo's fun Kabukicho district pulses with neon.

DAISANN McLANE divides her time between New York and Hong Kong. Follow her on her blog at therealtravelblog.com.

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BOYD MATSON

The Party That Never Ends

WERE FOUR GUYS laughing and posing for photos in the middle of a crowded street in Salvador, Brazil. One man wears a red miniskirt with black polka dots, black kneesocks, and red gloves. Another pairs a blue-trimmed bikini top with blue eye shadow. A third guy is shirtless, all the better for showing off his pecs and biceps as he flexes in exaggerated bodybuilder poses. Although I'm in regular clothes, speak no Portuguese, and have just met these three gentlemen, who speak no English, we quickly bond and mug for cameras. Hey, that's just the party spirit.

The Portuguese surely had a different image in mind when they established Salvador as the first capital of Brazil. They imported Catholicism and churches to cement morality and virtue, or at least a fear-of-God work ethic to keep noses to the grindstone. But to actually do the work—the really hard manual labor—the Portuguese also imported tens of thousands of slaves from Africa. And so this port city on the northeastern coast of Brazil became a melting pot of indigenous Indians, Europeans, and Africans, with all those religions and customs stirred and heated in the humidity of this rain forest zone. The resulting stew transformed the City of the Holy Savior of the Bay of All Saints, as Salvador was known historically, into Brazil's unofficial Capital of Happiness.

Street parades, art, and music provide the rhythm of life in Salvador, so I decide to see if any locals might be willing to teach me how to party like a Salvadoran—that is, other than hanging around guys in bikini tops. My guide, Conor O'Sullivan, drives me to the nearby town of Maragogipe to meet craftspeople who make the masks and costumes that traditionally appear in Carnival celebrations. The elaborate masks went out of style for several years at the big parades, but as one artist tells me, "Here in Maragogipe, people say that the only person who doesn't go out in a mask is a person who hasn't been born yet." I'm thinking a mask would be useful next time embarrassing photos get snapped, so I buy a couple.

But even more than festive attire, music fuels the party wagon. Here in Brazil that means the samba, an infectious beat that makes you want to get up and move. What I quickly discover, however, is that the way I move is quite different from the way Brazilians move. My rhythm-challenged tendencies are confirmed when O'Sullivan takes me to a popular music venue to hear the group Cortejo Afro. The band, in the best Salvadoran tradition of cultural fusion, throws some African rhythms on top of the samba line, further complicating an already impossible series of dance moves that require different body parts to move in competing directions simultaneously. Neither alcohol nor a mask can save my pride now. I think I know how Tom DeLay must have felt on *Dancing With the Stars*.

One last hope remains in the quest to help my inner party animal express itself: private percussion lessons. I think I can handle banging on something. O'Sullivan takes me to the home of one of Salvador's leading percussionists, Giba Conceição, who brings me into a room filled with drums, shakers, rattles, gourds, and every other conceivable kind of instrument that can be played by simply tapping to the beat. How hard can it be to play any of these? Just in case, I suggest we start with an easy one, so he pulls out an instrument called a *reco-reco*. It's a metal tube with a couple

of springs attached along one side. To play it, I'm told you drag a stick across the springs. Of course it's all about the rhythm and the direction you drag the stick, and whether it's a short drag or a long drag—and right there, that's doing two or three things at once, so the *reco-reco* goes back in its box.

Next he shows me something called the *trompete cretino*, which is a funnel with a hose attached and a trumpet mouthpiece on the other end of the hose. The only thing I'd ever done with a hose and a funnel was siphon gas for my car. OK, there may have also been a drinking game with those same materials once. Neither, however, prepared me to make music. So Conceição

demonstrates a variety of shakers, all of which require the player to dance while shaking to the pulse, a skill harder than walking and chewing gum at the same time. I tell Conceição I need an instrument that will allow me to just sit and bang on something. We settle on a conga drum. He shows me the simplest beat.

After much practice, I learn I still cannot find the rhythm, at least consistently, especially when Conceição adds syncopation to provide texture and flavor—the essence of Salvador's music. Every time he adds, I subtract by getting lost. But he does teach me the most important lesson about Salvador's party spirit, and it's the same message those guys on the street were sharing. It's not about how well you dance, or play the drums, or sing, or even if you speak the language. It's about your willingness to throw yourself into a moment. If you're willing to jump in with both feet, Salvadorans are happy to welcome you to the party. And anytime you find a place where people aren't judging your performance but are simply applauding your effort, you've found a capital of happiness. ■



Carnival in Brazil is a swirl of music and dance.

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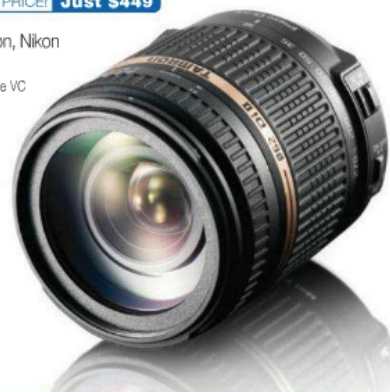
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A Traveler's Secret Weapon

IF YOU WANT BETTER CUSTOMER service on your next trip—and who doesn't?—then reach for your pocket. But don't bother pulling out your platinum card to impress a ticket agent, or a crisp Andrew Jackson to tip your bellhop. Whip out your wireless device instead. Your smartphone is likely the most effective tool for securing the treatment you deserve when you're on the road. ¶ Today's iPhones and Galaxys are multipurpose tools for travelers, allowing you to send messages, calculate a tip, find a flight, and, oh yeah, make an actual voice call. And the built-in camera is for more than just the cute faces your kid or cat makes. ¶ "Smartphone photos have leveled the playing field

when it comes to customer service," says Carlos Miller, publisher of the blog *Photography Is Not a Crime*. It isn't the digital images alone that prod companies into upping their game, but the potential of the images to spread across social networks. Often, photos broadcasting the moldy bathroom tiles or the broken airline seat offer a shortcut to the normal grievance process, eliminating the need to write a complaint letter.

Companies will do a lot to avoid having their reputations besmirched by photos of broken toilets, busted TV screens, and unpalatable meals. Sometimes, you don't even have to post the incriminating images online to encourage a business to do the right thing. Just the suggestion of your finger hovering over the Instagram icon is often enough. Karen Rinehart, a writer who lives in South Bend, Indiana, routinely photographs her hotel rooms when they are unclear. "When the staff sees me snapping away, someone usually offers to get the room cleaned or give me an upgrade to a better room," she says.

Dave Nathan, a retired firefighter from Birmingham, Alabama, was disappointed when he used his Delta frequent flier miles to purchase a first-class seat on a flight from Berlin to Paris on Air France, one of Delta's code-share partners. "It turned out that this

version of first class was three-across coach seating with the middle seat blocked out by a flip-down tray," he recalls. "My knees were firmly wedged against the seat in front of me." He sent an image to Delta, which credited him with 9,000 frequent flier miles.

The phone is also your most loyal companion when you're on the road. Take a broken parking meter, for example. Michael Edelstein snapped a cellphone image of his busted meter in Berkeley, California, and when he received a ticket, he sent the picture to the court. Case dismissed. Also, take photos of your rental car as if it were your newborn baby. In an effort to boost profits, some car rental companies aggressively pursue every possible damage claim, even for minor dings and dents, and even when there's no proof you did it. Your photos may be your only defense against excessive or specious charges. Make sure you take photos before and after the rental period.

At the airport, I opt out of the TSA's full-body scanners at the screening area, which means I automatically receive a pat-down. Lucky me. Taking photos or a video of the manual search (or having a traveling companion do it for you) is perfectly legal, as long as local ordinances don't forbid it and you don't interfere with the screening process. I find that it makes the screeners conduct their

search by the book (lest the images end up on Facebook).

But hang on, shutterbugs. Not everything can or should be photographed. "In the United States, as a general rule, if you can observe something from a public place you have the right to take a photograph," says Mickey Osterreicher, general counsel for the National Press Photographers Association. When it comes to private property like a hotel lobby or the interior of an aircraft, photography is sometimes restricted by policy. Osterreicher says the rules should be clearly posted. But there are documented cases of passengers being shown the door for taking photos of their airline seat. The scenario is even murkier overseas, where laws or customs can prohibit taking pictures even of public places.

I think it's only a matter of time before the travel industry embraces

photos as a way to help customers. It sounds far-fetched, but some industries have already done so, according to Jordy Leiser, who co-founded an independent customer service ratings and analytics company called StellaService. One confectioner asks a customer to send a picture of a damaged box of chocolates before it authorizes a refund. The most forward-looking businesses, Leiser adds, "use photos to enhance their efficiency and better serve customers."

With every photo you take and post online, you're pushing the travel industry toward a day when it welcomes your photos of its products—especially the ones that illustrate your disappointment—because it's an opportunity to improve. If that ever happens, I may be out of a job. ■



Just in case: Snap a photo of your rental car.

CHRISTOPHER ELLIOTT addresses readers' travel problems. E-mail your story to celliott@ngs.org.

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COSTAS CHRIST

Fable for the Philippines

LINDA ADRIANO was a shy woman. A single mother, she supported her household by selling trinkets out of her handbag on Palawan—a long island of tropical landscapes teeming with flora and fauna in the southwestern Philippines. One day, she picked up a discarded soda can, thinking that if she could collect more and sell them to a scrap metal dealer, she would earn better money. The idea of gathering and recycling cans led her to Ten Knots-El Nido Resorts—a local ecotourism company. Impressed by her motivation, the environmental director offered financing and training. ¶ Today, Adriano runs a recycling center that handles all

of El Nido Resorts' recyclable waste, including glass and plastic.

"I call it turning trash to treasure," Adriano explains to me beneath the shade of coconut palms and surrounded by piles of glass, cardboard, and metal cans bound for buyers in the capital, Manila. "Ecotourism changed my life, and theirs too," she adds, nodding to her six full-time workers.

There are more than 7,000 islands floating in a sea of striking blue in this remarkably hospitable country, where locals are apt to invite you to a meal accompanied by San Miguel, the local beer, as well as lots of laughter and often singing. So it comes as no surprise that after tourism's heavy trek across Southeast Asia's once pristine outposts, from Bali to Ha Long Bay, the less explored parts of the Philippines (which still make up most of the country) are poised to be the latest "paradise found." Indeed, that is already under way, which is why this tale of two islands—Palawan and Boracay—offers lessons as the country lays out the welcome mat to more visitors.

Boracay had an early taste of tourism's promise to deliver prosperity to poor countries. In the 1990s, backpackers flocked to its sleepy villages and jungly hills, chasing rumors of the world's most beautiful beach. Savvy marketing and mass tourism followed, and the island got pounded by a tsunami of development. Hotels, bars, restaurants, and mini-malls transformed the once virgin "White Beach" into a free-for-all zone. Untreated wastewater poured into

the sea; litter grew faster than introduced exotic flowers; wildlife habitat disappeared; locals were priced out of their family lands. Visitors who saw Boracay when its beach was untrampled would find it unrecognizable today.

If Boracay was the hare—taking the full-throttle approach—then Palawan was the more plodding but thoughtful tortoise. (It's not an entirely fair comparison, as the vastly larger Palawan had built-in buffers against the onslaught; for instance, its wish-you-were-here blue lagoons, coral reefs, and verdant jungle are not all concentrated in one locale.) It eschewed rapid development and the quick profits that accompany it. Along the way, it has embraced sustainable tourism practices such as educating villagers, courting Earth-friendly travel businesses, and forging partnerships with organizations such as Conservation International and the World Wildlife Fund.

More than a decade later, that approach is paying off: The mayor of Puerto Princesa, the provincial capital, says that tourism has helped protect its cultural and natural heritage. Nearby is the Puerto Princesa Subterranean River National Park, with perhaps the world's longest navigable underground river; the area is a haven for endemic birds, monkeys, and monitor lizards. The park serves as an example of community-based tourism, supporting conservation and directing benefits to local people.

In Coron, another Palawan enclave of almost surreal natural beauty and home to lakes sacred to the indigenous Tagbanua people, the sustainable Coron Initiative was set up to avoid Boracay's mistakes. Its action plan includes environmental education for residents and visitors alike. And this year, El Nido Resorts won an award from the World Travel and Tourism Council for its strategy of community empowerment and for spearheading the creation of a marine reserve.

The hare has taken notice. On a recent visit to Boracay, I discovered that new international hotels are bringing sustainable practices to the island.

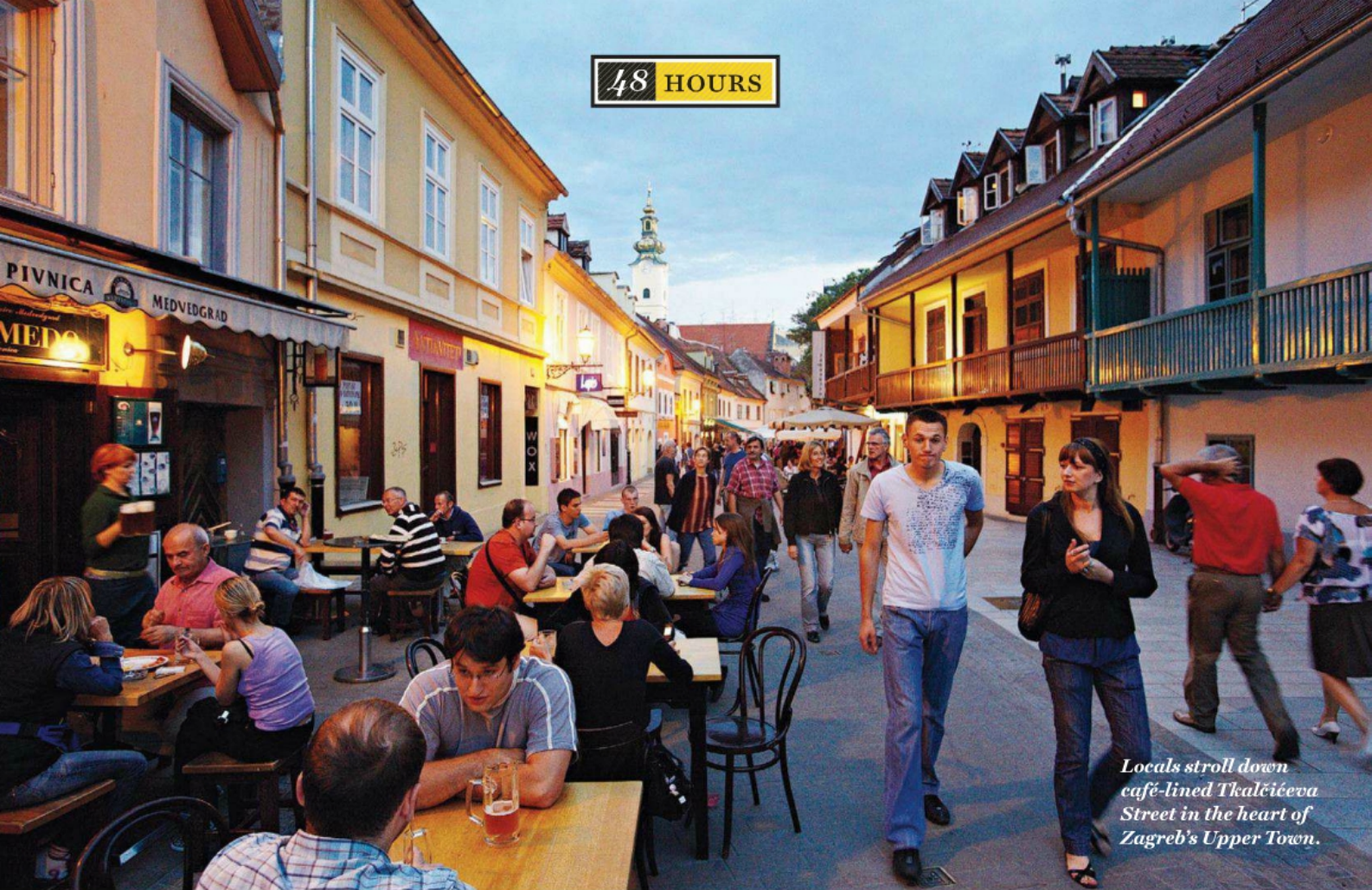
For instance, Shangri-La's resort uses recycled glass bottles for its own filtered water, and it is protecting the last stand of forest for the endangered flying fox, along with educating guests on other eco-initiatives. "We have introduced sustainable seafood, opened an environmental education center, and created our own recycling program. We use nontoxic cleaning products. Our goal is to show other hotels on Boracay what is possible," says Amit Oberoi, Shangri-La's general manager.

With annual tourism in the country targeted to double to ten million visitors by 2016, the lessons of Boracay and Palawan are not lost on younger Filipinos. The country rallied thousands of volunteers to an international coastal cleanup (second only to the U.S. in number of volunteers), and the former U.S. military base at Subic Bay has become the first sustainable-tourism school in the Asia-Pacific region, educating a new generation of leaders.

As in the fable, the tortoises are winning in the Philippines. Our job as travelers is to support tortoises wherever we find them. ■



Palawan: steering toward sustainable growth.



Locals stroll down café-lined Tkalčićeva Street in the heart of Zagreb's Upper Town.

Zagreb's New Zing

THE CREATIVE CLASS RISES IN CROATIA'S CAPITAL CITY

By ANJA MUTIĆ

CROATIA'S SUN-KISSED Adriatic coast, with 1,185 islands, steals the spotlight from its urban center. But the capital of the European Union's youngest member state (as of July) is on the upswing with a creative art boom and a culinary awakening. Those who visit find a fresh mix of old and new Europe. "Zagreb is a traditional Mitteleuropa city packed with well-worn charm," says Lana Cavar, one of Croatia's prominent graphic designers, who splits her time between Zagreb and the United States. "Locals won't compromise their ease of life by giving up a long espresso break on a sunny sidewalk." Dig a little deeper, and alongside Zagreb's traditional delights you'll find a clutch of enthusiasts restoring the city's unsung streetscapes with new projects. It's these people who give Zagreb a palpable zing.

DAY ONE

MORNING Hilltop highlights

Zagreb's heart and soul is **Trg Bana Jelačića** in the Lower Town, an expansive square lined with Habsburg-era buildings and a bronze statue of the 19th-century ruler who symbolizes Croatia's struggle for independence. The square is the major streetcar intersection and the city's social center, where locals meet up and lounge in sidewalk cafés. Wind through its flower stands and climb the stairs to **Dolac** in Upper Town, the daily market where farmers have hawked their homegrown wares—from fresh produce to artisanal honey—since 1930. Meander the stalls and sample local dishes such as *sir i vrhnje* (cottage cheese with cream). From there, head up more stairs to the adjoining hilltop, home to **Lotrščak Tower**. Climb the spiral staircase to the wooden deck of this 13th-century tower

built as protection from the Turks; today it offers a 360-degree view of the red-tiled rooftops below. At noon, brace yourself for a cannon blast, by which locals have set their watches since 1877. Steps away, the **Museum of Broken Relationships**, founded by a former romantic couple, pays homage to failed relationships with a poignant collection of quirky mementos—from handcuffs to rubber shoes—donated from around the globe. Pick up the best-selling Bad Memories Eraser at the museum shop. Dine at nearby **Didov San**, a rustic tavern with hearty fare (like prosciutto-wrapped grilled frogs) prepared in the style of the Neretva River delta in Dalmatia's hinterland.

AFTERNOON Fashion dos

Back in the Lower Town, stroll west along one of Zagreb's longest streets, **Ilica**, lined with unique shops, bakeries, and

restaurants. Have a peek at **Prostor** in a courtyard off Mesnička, with handcrafted designs—from 3-D-printed jewelry to lampshades made of colorful, eco-friendly cardboard—by upcoming Croatian artists. Venture into Dežmanov Prolaz to ogle the **I-gle boutique**, with cool couture, including sculptural dresses and asymmetrical skirts by local designers Nataša Mihaljčičin and Martina Vrdoljak-Ranilović. Fuel up with a shot of coffee at **Eliscaffè**, where 100 percent arabica beans are roasted and brewed by Zagreb's award-winning barista Nik Orosi.

EVENING *Barbecue and blues*

Pay respects to Croatia's central European roots at **Vinodol**, an old-time eatery abuzz with locals and drop-ins. Sit outdoors on the ivy-covered patio to see lamb, veal, and golden potatoes baked in a *peka* (domed oven), or have a seat inside the cozy, vaulted dining room. The meat-focused menu features traditional dishes that span the region; vegetarian options include house-made noodles, cheese croquettes, and creamy broccoli soup. Save room for the strudel, a flaky, layered pastry filled with plums, apricots, or strawberries. Mingle with a convivial crowd at **VIP Club**, a nightlife newcomer with a jazz club ambience and live beats ranging from blues to Balkan.

DAY TWO

MORNING *Art attack*

Check out **Galerija Nova**, a city-owned gallery run by What, How & for Whom, a collective renowned for addressing delicate sociopolitical issues; from September through mid-November, it's home to Meeting Points, a multidisciplinary festival focused on presenting art from the Arab world. Hop on the streetcar or take a short walk toward the main bus station to see the graffiti-lined wall that sparked **Museum Street Art**, which "has no operating hours, dedicated curators, or pompous openings," says founder Ivana Vukšić. The collective gathered 80 artists who turned a nondescript wall lining busy Branimirova into one of Zagreb's most photographed sights; look for colorful graffiti signed by local artists Puma 34 and OKO. Catch a cab across the Sava River to the **Museum of Contemporary Art**, the largest art museum in Croatia, in a serpentine building by architect Igor Franić. With its collection of 12,000 works, it revived Novi Zagreb, a formerly dormant area of socialist-style apartments. Its showpiece is the "Double Slide" by Belgian artist Carsten Höller, a thrilling ride in a pair of metal tubes that



Friends greet each other in Trg Bana Jelačića, Zagreb's vast central square (above). Lari & Penati bistro offers roast chicken (below) on a menu that changes daily.

twist down from the top floor. "In this moment at Croatia's crossroads, wonderful artists are emerging, ready to burst on the global art circuit," says Vanja Žanko, curator of **Lauba**, a private space displaying Croatian contemporary art in a former Austro-Hungarian military riding arena. This black monolith in an industrial area of western Zagreb lies at the forefront of the city's urban renewal. The historic building stays fresh with rotating exhibitions, such as Ivana Franke's "Latency," an ephemeral light installation inside a pitch-black nook.

AFTERNOON *Gardens and spirits*

Wander Zagreb's **Botanical Garden**, created in 1889, with some 10,000 plant species arranged in several sections, including an

English-style arboretum, a French-style flower parterre, and a rock garden with indigenous flora. For lunch, hit the city's famed sidewalk cafés along Tkalčićeva Street. Grab a terrace seat at **Cica**, a miniscule bar in a storefront, known for its 25 varieties of rakija (similar to brandy), from honey to fig. Next, go on a solar system hunt, one of Zagreb's most peculiar attractions—an installation called "Nine Views" by artist Davor Preis, who in 2004 placed models of nine planets (including Pluto) around the city. Spot Mars on Tkalčićeva and Venus in Trg Bana Jelačića.

EVENING *Calling it a night*

Amble east of the square to Zagreb's foodie hot spot, tucked away in an alleyway off Vlaška. Culinary cognoscenti flock to **Mali Bar** owned by noted chef and food writer Ana Ugarković, with warm earth-toned interiors and fusion tapas: Smoked tuna with saffron sauce is a favorite. Next door is **Karijola**, Zagreb's beloved pizza joint, popular for thin crusts topped with market-fresh ingredients such as mushrooms and mozzarella. Stroll back to the center for a drink at **Kino Europa** inside a 1920s cinema, which houses a café/bar and hosts regular screenings of art house flicks. Wrap up the evening with a walk around **Stross**, an alfresco hangout with a makeshift bar (during summer) on leafy Strossmayer promenade, live music (from jazz to hip-hop), and the twinkle of city lights below. ■



JUST IN

World Theatre Festival brings contemporary theater troupes to Zagreb each September. Among this year's talent, Schaubühne am Lehniner Platz from Berlin will perform Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice*. The **25 FPS Festival** (September 24-27) presents avant-garde films from around the world, and the **Zagreb Film Festival** (October 20-27) is a repertoire of nearly 100 screenings—from first films of Polish directors to science fiction.

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Colorful boats laze in Cadgwith, a fishing village on the Lizard Peninsula in south Cornwall, England.

Much Ado About Cornwall

OFF-THE-SHIP EXCURSIONS ON ENGLAND'S SOUTHERN COAST

By MILLIE KERR

FALMOUTH SITS in the center of the “Cornish Riviera,” England’s charming southwestern coastline, and the port is its lifeblood. For centuries, the world’s third deepest natural harbor ushered in commercial and military vessels, and in the past 70 years it witnessed epic send-offs, including D-Day troops bound for Normandy. Recently celebrating its 350th anniversary, Falmouth offers unique insights into England’s maritime history, along with pastoral excursions.

RAMBLING PATHWAYS Explore the **South West Coast Path**—England’s longest public footpath at 630 miles—as you walk to sandy Swanpool Beach and on to **Pendennis Castle**, built by Henry VIII in the early 16th century to protect England from French and Spanish invasion. The fortress, Cornwall’s largest, withstood a five-month siege during the English Civil War, which you’ll witness

through re-creations inside the Tudor gun deck. Afterward, enjoy Cornish pasties (meat pies) in the castle’s tearoom. (4 hours)

NAUTICAL NODS Sitting in a Falmouth hotel room, Kenneth Grahame penned letters to his son, whom he affectionately called “Mouse.” His epistles inspired *Wind in the Willows*, in which he wrote, “There’s nothing half so much worth doing as messing about in boats.” Stop by the **Greenbank Hotel** to see his notes before hopping aboard a ferry bound for **St. Mawes**. Once there, tour cloverleaf St. Mawes Castle, or continue your nautical adventure along the Percuil River. Look out for herons and egrets while paddling upstream (St. Mawes Kayaks offers rentals). (4-5 hours)

FROM THE SEA Seafood restaurateur Rick Stein runs a culinary empire in Padstow, a historic fishing village on Cornwall’s quiet

northern coast, and recently opened an eponymous restaurant in Falmouth. Stein admired the “romantic port” before setting up shop beside the **National Maritime Museum Cornwall**. Dig into fish-and-chips before playing coast guard at the Maritime Museum’s interactive search-and-rescue exhibit. Check out *Rita*—the vessel that brought Ben Ainslie his three gold medals for sailing at the 2012 Olympics. (3-4 hours)

HIDDEN COVE Tourists flock like seabirds to Land’s End—the most westerly point on England’s mainland—but you can skip the crowds in favor of a relaxed outing to the **Lizard Peninsula**. Soak up rays at **Kynance Cove** before treating yourself to ice cream topped with clotted cream at the Kynance Cove Café. Or visit wooded **Trelowarren Estate**, a thousand-year-old property owned by the same family for 600 years. (4-5 hours) ■

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Cambodia's Comeback

STYLISH NEW HOTELS REINVIGORATE PHNOM PENH

By SAMANTHA BROWN

PHNOM PENH, one of Southeast Asia's most mesmerizing and fast-changing capitals, boasts eclectic architecture bearing witness to the turbulence of Cambodia's recent history. In the past 60 years the country cast off French colonialism, suffered one of the worst genocides in history in which the Khmer Rouge forcibly evacuated the city of Phnom Penh, emerged from a Vietnamese occupation, and, finally, installed a democracy.

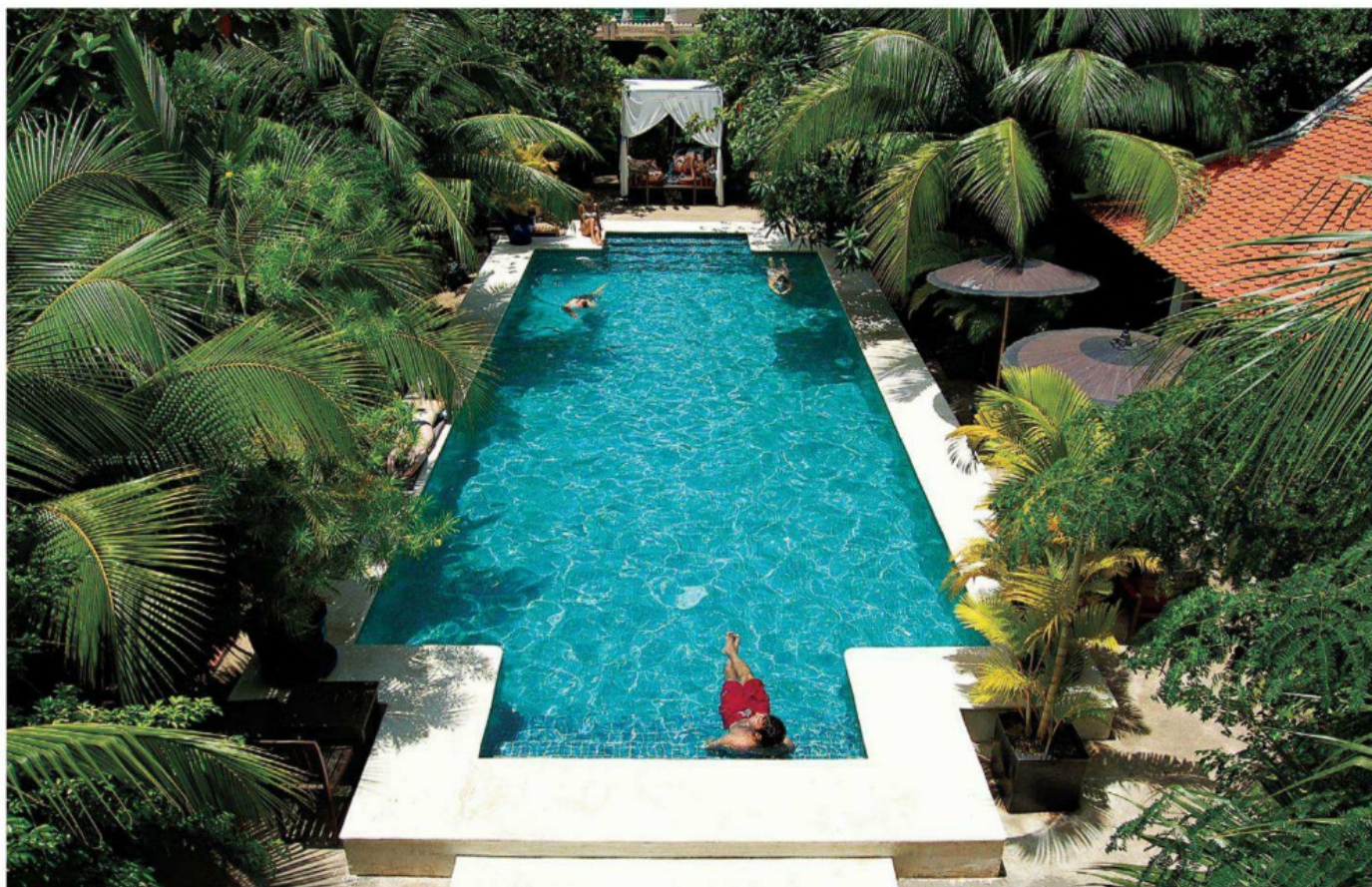
Travelers can ensconce themselves at the grande dame of Phnom Penh hotels, the colonial-era **Raffles Hotel Le Royal** (from \$160), but the 21st century has seen the rise of boutique hotels tucked between frangipani-shaded Buddhist temples and

vibrant cafés. Entrepreneurs have scrambled to restore decaying French remnants and the city's modernist-meets-Asia 1960s buildings, and are now snapping up recent structures with their own quirky features.

Unobtrusively located near the yellow-walled Royal Palace—a complex of ornate buildings including the residence of Cambodia's chief of state, King Norodom Sihamoni—the **Pavilion** (from \$50) is one of a handful of hotels with guest rooms in a French colonial-era building. The surrounding historical quarter is Phnom Penh's most genteel, yet the streets fizz with energy; teenagers frequent the bubble-tea shops, local restaurants sun-dry their beef streetside, and wine shops and cafés lure in the expatriate crowd. Within the Pavilion

grounds the atmosphere is hushed; pad across painted tiles from the 1940s in the lobby decorated with Asian objets d'art, and curl up on a daybed by the pool, surrounded by tropical gardens. At sunset, take a cruise on the hotel's rice boat along the Mekong River to view floating fishing villages.

In the same area, the Pavilion's owners have also opened **Plantation** (from \$65), a former colonial mansion with two modern wings of hotel rooms. The art historian who oversaw the mansion reconstruction tasted the plaster to determine its age. Bright, sunny guest rooms with accents of citrus-colored silk pillows and throws overlook a lush courtyard and pool, ringed by private cabanas and coconut and acacia trees. Nearby, the National Museum offers



Within walking distance of the Royal Palace, the Pavilion's pool and garden create an oasis in Cambodia's capital city.



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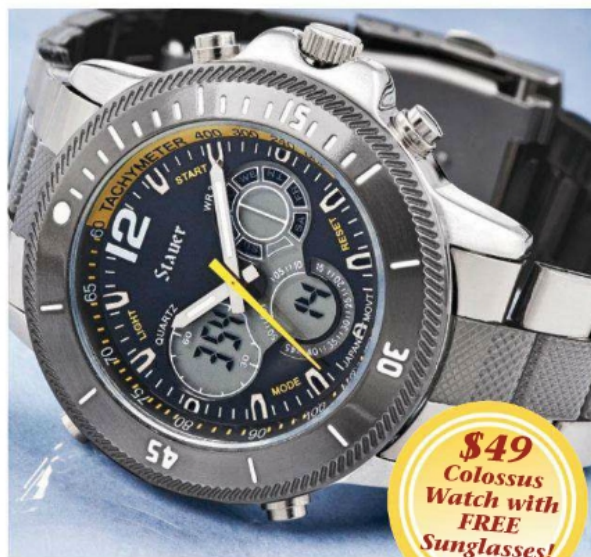
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CANADA'S NO-BAKE TREAT STACKS UP



Turquoise latticework decorates La Maison d'Ambre's Shanghai suite.

a collection of ancient tablets inscribed in Sanskrit and artifacts from a prehistoric burial site; in the evening the museum hosts folk dance performances.

La Maison d'Ambre (from \$100), which overlooks the city's namesake, Wat Phnom ("hill temple"), was originally a 1960s office building. Its curved, white concrete facade has been faithfully restored to its "New Khmer Architecture" roots. Hidden behind La Maison's grand exterior are a dozen polished suites. Each pays homage to a global city featured in a popular film: The Casablanca suite features turquoise, navy, and cream Moroccan-style textiles, lamps, and artwork. Sip on a cocktail in the chic orange and purple rooftop bar, or step outside and explore, wandering past gem shops and fresh sugarcane juice stalls to reach gritty Phsar Chas ("old market"), where locals have shopped for decades.

The **Sangkum** (from \$60) is a beautiful example of the fast-disappearing "golden age" style. Situated in a residential area a few blocks north of Wat Phnom, the villa hotel has been renovated and now features details of New Khmer Architecture, including open communal areas to encourage airflow, *claustras*—decorative concrete screens—and colorful tiled floors. Guest rooms hark back to the era too, with an eclectic range of 1960s Cambodian rosewood furniture.

Originally the residence for the U.S. Embassy, the columned **White Mansion** is an imposing hotel located in the historic area near the Royal Palace on Street 240, the main shopping street in Phnom Penh. Guest rooms are decorated with ebony lattice paneling, granite floors, and fresh flowers and include minibars stocked with complimentary nonalcoholic beverages. A dramatic sweeping staircase still descends into the lobby; it's easy to imagine diplomatic whispers over cocktails in the cavernous space. At the hotel's gift shop, pick up woven silk clothing handcrafted by a cooperative of artisans with disabilities. ■

ASK A CANADIAN about his favorite dessert and "Nanaimo bar" (pronounced nuh-NYE-mo) is the likely reply. Named for the harbor town on Vancouver Island, the no-bake treat has sweetened the collective Canadian memory for decades. The three-layer dessert—a textured crust (chocolate, coconut, almonds, and butter) that is smothered with a vanilla custard middle and topped with a firm layer of chocolate—is assembled, refrigerated, then cut into squares. Vancouver Island's coal mining families packed them in lunches. The first known recipe to use the name Nanaimo bar was published in the *Vancouver Sun's* 1953 *Edith Adams' Fourteenth Prize Cook Book*. The moniker stuck, and the ubiquitous bar is baked into the national culture. Nanaimo resident Joyce Hardcastle won a highly publicized competition in 1986 declaring her recipe the town's "official" formula for a confection that now lures curious tourists from all over the country. "That's why we added a Nanaimo bar exhibition," says David Hill-Turner, curator of the **Nanaimo Museum**. For a tasty trek, pick up a **Nanaimo Bar Trail** map featuring over 25 toothsome stops around town, including the **Modern Café** for a Nanaimo bar martini. Traditionalists, however, may prefer **Mon Petit Choux**, where French pastries fight for attention next to Canada's most beloved dessert. —KIMBERLEY LOVATO



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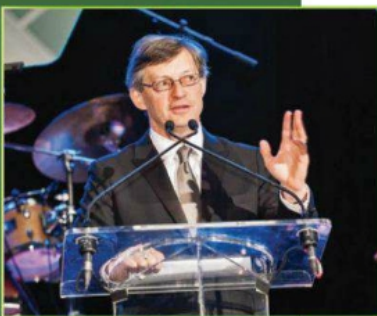
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Photographs by Silk Studio (top to bottom): Milstein Hall of Ocean Life, American Museum of Natural History; Daniel R. Katz, founder and board chair, Rainforest Alliance; Deborah Cox, Grammy-nominated R&B singer-songwriter and actress, with Tensie Whelan, president, Rainforest Alliance; Nell Newman, co-founder and president of Newman's Own Organics; The Second Generation; CHIC, featuring Nile Rodgers.

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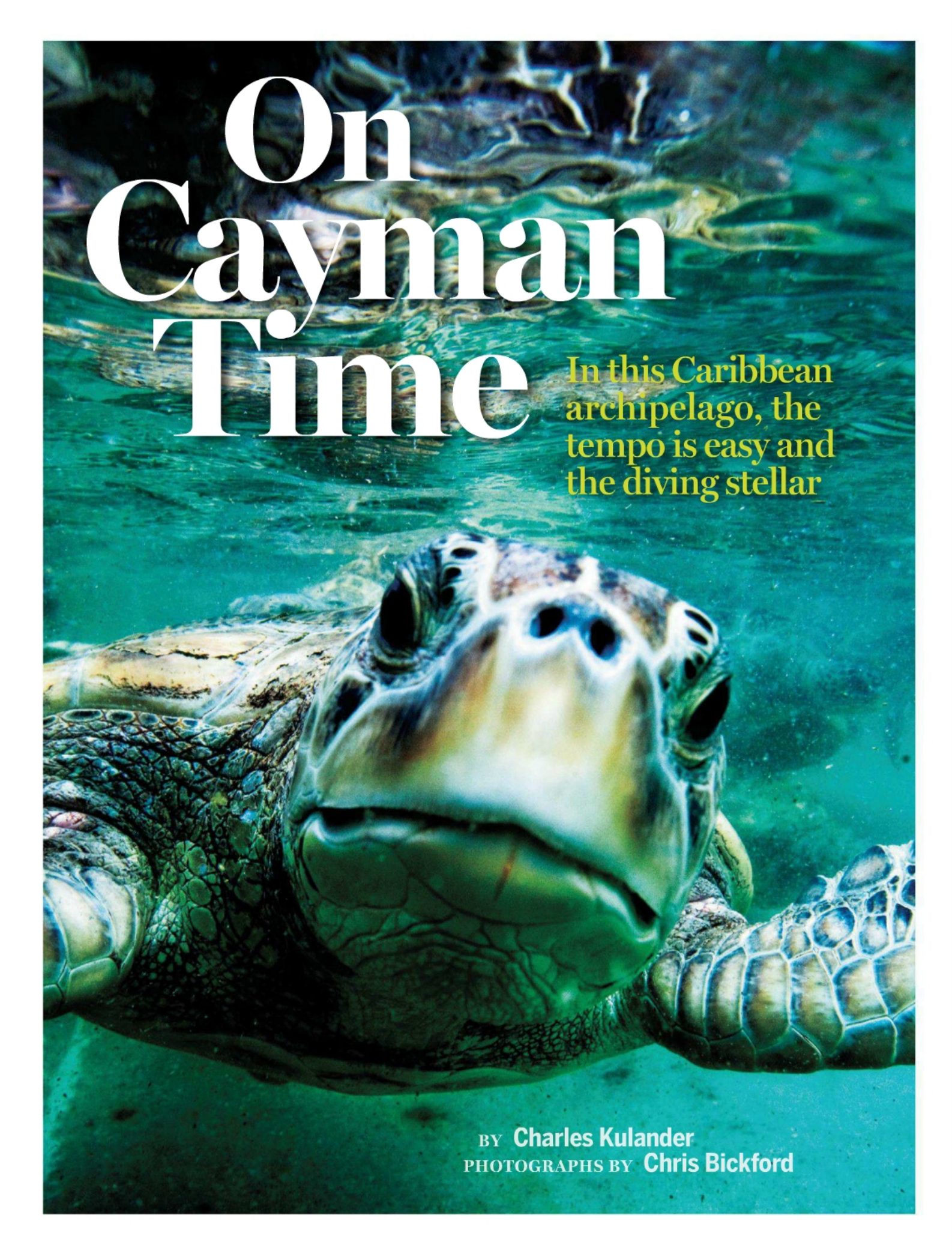
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With its palm trees and sand roads, Cayman Brac keeps it simple. Sea turtles (opposite) once filled Cayman waters.



On Cayman Time

In this Caribbean archipelago, the tempo is easy and the diving stellar

BY Charles Kulander
PHOTOGRAPHS BY Chris Bickford

“Look for flashes of red,”

Keino Daley whispers back to me. We're picking our way along a trail of limestone on Cayman Brac, hell-bent on spotting what brings naturalists here from around the world: the Cayman Brac parrot, an endangered species found only on this 12-mile-long Caribbean island. Thing is, this bird's green feathers blend it into the tropical brush around us. Our hopes hinge on glimpsing the bird's red cheek and throat feathers.



Leaning back, Daley cups his hands and tweets out birdcalls. A songbird chirps in reply. He turns to me reassuringly. “No worries; the parrots never leave the Brac”—a trait, I’m discovering, shared by many residents of this, the most remote of the three isles that make up the Cayman Islands. Daley, an enthusiastic 22-year-old with a beaming smile, has left here only to visit the relative bustle of Grand Cayman—and only when he absolutely had to.

“Each time I’ve left, the minute I’m back I want to just kiss and hug this island, from West End to Spot Bay,” he’d told me. “I look forward to dying here.”

Who wouldn’t, I think as I look around this unique biosphere, hoisted atop sheer limestone cliffs overhanging electric blue seas, hardly touched by tourists. Just one small diving resort and a handful of modest lodgings accommodate any visitors—and the self-reliant islanders make no bones about it: They’re content with things just the way they are. If the secret to happiness is ever to be found, it will be on an island, probably in the Caribbean, quite possibly right here on Cayman Brac.

Certainly, good cheer is abundant here. The Cayman Islands—which officially are a British overseas territory comprising Cayman

Brac, Grand Cayman, and Little Cayman—enjoy, according to at least one measurement, the highest standard of living in the Caribbean (sorry, St. Barts). Of course, much of this derives from the trickle-down economics of having more than a trillion dollars of global investment—tax free—discreetly parked on hard drives in the capital, George Town.

I'd always written off the Cayman Islands as a pin-striped paradise for bankers visiting their money, a place routinely invoked during political mudslinging, until a knowledgeable friend set me straight.

"Don't judge this book by its cover," she said. "The Cayman Islands are so much more than the offshore banking on Grand Cayman. In fact, you'll have a hard time finding a major bank building. Each of the three islands is different from the others; among them you have mainstream tourism, traditional island culture, nature reserves, rare animal species, and some of the best diving in the world—with just one swipe of a passport. It's a one-size-fits-all Caribbean hat trick."

Her pronouncement sent me to my atlas, where I had a hard time even locating the islands. Three tiny specks awash in the Caribbean Sea 195 miles south of Cuba and 180 miles northwest of Jamaica, the Cayman Islands are farther from land than any other Caribbean island—a geographical exile that led to them being largely ignored. Even Christopher Columbus, who discovered the swampy isles of jagged limestone in 1503, did the nautical equivalent of a drive-by. When they finally were settled, it was by people who sort of ended up here, like driftwood: mutineers, shipwreck victims, outcasts, even pirates.

"We're considered the brown necks of the Cayman Islands. Like your rednecks, we don't question who we are," says George Walton as he checks me in to Cayman Brac's sole B&B, Mango Manor, built by a sea captain and decorated with so many nautical charts and model ships that it fairly sways with the tide. Walton is referring to the thousand or so resolute "Brackers" who live on this hunk of stone, seafaring folk who have kept to the shoreline. "We're a proud people, and not prone to service jobs," he explains. I take this as my cue to lug my bag up the narrow staircase.

Walton connects me with Daley, who is a guide with the National Trust. Daley's big frame—he barely fits in the passenger seat of my rental car—seems to match his homegrown joie de vivre, which overflows at every turn of the road: at seeing schoolgirls waving to us from a lemonade stand and Bible-clutching matrons milling in front of the Ebenezer Baptist Church, then at the gap-toothed bicyclist who latches on to my door handle as we coast down the blacktop hemming the bluff. "Everybody knows everybody here," Daley exclaims, joyfully. "That's why I love it so."

Brac, according to local lore, comes from the Gaelic for bluff, the physical feature that most distinguishes Cayman Brac from its sister islands. We drive up through a bushy forest of silver thatch palms and crunch to a stop at a lighthouse. Seas roar below us.

We've come for the view from this highest, easternmost point in the Cayman Islands—and to spot red-footed and brown boobies, which nest here. Daley weaves me through thickets of shamrocks and needle-sharp yucca plants. Frigatebirds hover overhead, scissoring their forked tails, as nesting boobies poke their beaks at us from the cliff's edge, a lot more brazen than in the old days when boys braved these perilous cliffs to steal their eggs, hoping to become "mannish" by eating them.

The trail ends on the other side of the island, at Peter's Cave, a limestone alcove where tenacious Brackers have sought refuge from hurricanes for centuries.

"I've sheltered in Peter's Cave many times," Tenson Scott, Daley's neighbor back in Spot Bay, tells me when we stop in his cottage gift shop, NIM—Native Island Made—Things. "No storm will get you in there."

Waves strike by cliffs on Cayman Brac (opposite), easternmost of the Cayman Islands. "Iguana Mike" Vallee (top right) cozies up to an endangered Sister Isles rock iguana on Little Cayman. The menu at Pirates Point Resort features fresh wahoo (right).





Scott crafts jewelry with Caymanite, an agate-like stone found only here and in Hungary. As I look over his wares, which include his daughter's watercolors and turtle mobiles woven by his wife, I realize he's not interested in selling me stuff. This may be a gift store, but it's his gift of gab that he's intent on sharing. And on an island where conversation has been honed to an art form, Tenson Scott is the poet laureate. (His friends call him Tennyson.)

He clues me in to island secrets, from the longevity of Brackers ("my grandfather lived to 104") to their legendary seafaring skills. "We discovered the world long before the world ever discovered Cayman Brac," he tells me, explaining how in the aftermath of World War II, an American shipping magnate, Daniel Ludwig, hearing of "our courageous seafaring," turned the Cayman Islands into a virtual company town for his 60-ship fleet, National Bulk Carriers. Like most local men, Scott shipped out with them in the 1950s for \$95 a month. "You had four sons, you had four bank accounts. That's what built the Cayman Islands."

As an unexpected benefit, he adds, shipping out also healed racial tensions simmering since the end of slavery in 1834. "You put black and white on a ship together, you cause them to be close—and it was done," says Scott. "No law made that happen. The sea is what melt our color together."

"Amen," says Daley.

Next morning, I'm back on the bluff with Daley, searching for one of the 400 or so Cayman Brac parrots in a 280-acre refuge created just for them by the National Trust. Daley whistles through cupped hands, but all we get are songbirds flitting about. With the sun bearing down on us, we call it quits. "Let's go eat mango," says Daley. "My most favorite thing in the world, eatin' mango. And Merch grow the best you will ever taste." According to Daley, Merch Chantilope "can plant those shoes you're wearing, and in two weeks you'll have little shoes runnin' all over the place."

We pull up to a ramshackle farm cluttered with old cars and boats. Merch Chantilope extends a callused hand, his square-jawed face shaded by a straw hat, and soon we're peeling mangoes in the shade of his barn, juice running down to our elbows, as his wife brings forth a cornucopia of tropical fruit to try: carambola, pawpaw (papaya), soursop.

"What's your secret?" I ask.

"Red mole," he says, scooping up the fine red dirt that pockets the bluff's limestone craters. It's a mystery how this volcanic soil got here, though scientists figure winds carried it from Africa. "This and rainwater are all you need," he says. "Add hard work, and you always have a dollar in your pocket."

On the drive back to Mango Manor, Daley confesses, "I'm so scared we're losing our traditions. It's my fault I never learned to make silver-thatch rope, and I'm sorry I never learned to make a catboat, but I'm so happy I get to show people our island, and maybe that way, it helps keep our traditions alive."

That night, watching stars wheel overhead, I surrender to the simple pleasures of island life, so much so that I fail to set my alarm for my early morning flight to Little Cayman. It's a screeching that jolts me out of bed. I throw open my window to see a ruffled rainbow of red, blue, and green feathers jawing back and forth on the mango tree. I know I'm on island time when a Cayman Brac parrot is my wake-up call.

SEEN FROM MY PROP PLANE WINDOW, the sea between Cayman Brac and Little Cayman is a profound blue—for good reason. The Cayman Islands periscope up from a submarine ridge that plunges to the Caribbean's lowest point, the Cayman Trench, almost as deep as Mount Everest is high. Five miles to the west, Little Cayman comes into view. It appears even less developed than Cayman Brac, its flat interior speckled with lagoons and mangrove swamps, the



At "Stingray City" (right), stingrays are fed—a practice that may be altering their behavior. Fronds frame a palm on Little Cayman (left), home to colorful red-footed boobies (top left).



The Cayman Islands periscope up
from a submarine ridge that plunges to the
Caribbean's lowest point, the Cayman Trench,
almost as deep as Mount Everest is high.

shoreline haloed with frothing reefs separating green shallows from bottomless ultramarine. We bank over wee Blossom Village and thump down on a grassy airstrip frequented by sleepy iguanas.

Gladys Howard, owner of Pirates Point Resort, where I've booked a room, is there to meet me in a dusty pickup truck, putting to rest a lingering worry about not packing formal wear. I'm immediately swept up by this octogenarian force of nature—Liza Minnelli with a Texas drawl—who insists on showing me the entire ten-mile-long, mile-wide island, delivering a nonstop narrative of its history and gossip while pointing out the sights, like the red boobies roosting in the Booby Pond Nature Reserve, their turquoise beaks and startling red feet betraying the camouflage gray feathers.

"More red boobies here in February, during nesting season, than anywhere else in the Caribbean," she says like a proud parent. She helped found the preserve, considered of international importance, in 1995. She shows me another of her passions, a refuge for Sister Isles rock iguanas—a species related to the equally endangered blue iguanas of Grand Cayman—which have been largely wiped out on Cayman Brac, leaving on Little Cayman the world's last viable, yet struggling, population. "We've put up 'Iguana Right-of-Way' signs, but people still somehow manage to run them over," she huffs.

Many of Pirates Point's guests have more than 5,000 dives under their weight belts, and traveled here to plumb the depths of Bloody Bay Wall, a legendary 6,000-foot precipice encrusted with coral and considered one of the planet's top dive sites. I, who have never scuba dived outside of Utah (and most of that was in a swimming pool), feel like an interloper, the guy ready to tackle the Matterhorn after an hour at the climbing gym.

But there is no way I can stay on Little Cayman and not give the Wall a try; it would be like going to Capri and not seeing the Blue Grotto. To tease out my diving options, I grab a bicycle and ride against a buffeting headwind past the island's only bank (closed five days a week) and single church to the sherbet-colored bungalows of the Southern Cross Club, set on a brilliantly white beach. Dating from 1959, this is the oldest of Little Cayman's five homey resorts, and the only one posting a dress code: "If you're not barefoot, you're overdressed." I settle in at the palm-thatch bar, a hangout for expats who've ditched the rat race, harking back in spirit to the island's original "Caymaniacs," who were described in 1671 as a motley mix of "Soldiers, Planters and Privateers" that the Jamaican Council promised to pardon "of their past irregular Actions" if they would just please vacate the island.

Except these expats aren't leaving. Bill Christoffers gave up an engineering firm in Ohio to open a dive operation here. "Best decision I've made," he tells me.

I ask him about the liability involved in taking beginning divers out to Bloody Bay Wall.

"It's one of the most dramatic changes in depth in the world," he confirms. "You plunge from 18 to 6,000 feet—straight down. We work with plenty of beginning divers, though there is a downside." He pauses. "After diving Bloody Bay Wall, where do you go? Nothing else compares."

I pedal back to Pirates Point the long way, around the island, coasting on a tailwind as I pass ponds and mangroves. A quicksilver sea glints through the shadows. The entire excursion takes less than two hours, even with a stop at Tarpon Lake, to watch the large silver fish loll in tea-colored water.

I make it just in time to meet up with Mike Vallee, the wiry, tousle-haired dive instructor at Pirates Point, who also runs an iguana tour every Friday as part of his campaign to save the 2,000 or so endangered Sister Isles rock iguanas. We watch two scuttling dragons slam into each other as they duel. Overhead, frigatebirds harass boobies to scare them into coughing up food. "With sights like these, who needs TV?" Vallee asks. "And you haven't even seen the Wall."

Next morning finds me clinging to a stanchion as Pirates Point's dive boat hobbyhorses through a narrow cut in the surf-lashed reef, then yaws in a heavy swell rolling toward Bloody Bay Marine Park. I'm already feeling in over my head, and I'm not in the water yet. The experienced divers around me are lining up to leap off the transom. Nancy, a diver from Connecticut, tries to reassure me. "It's like jumping off the edge of the Grand Canyon."

With a hand over my regulator and mask, I take a giant leap of faith and plummet into the warm Caribbean water. My weight belt sinks me down 20 feet—and suddenly the reef gives way to a cliff that drops into a haunting cobalt blue void: Bloody Bay Wall. I release a last squirt of air from my buoyancy compensator, which sends me into a slow-motion free fall down the face of the cliff, as weightless as a skydiver. Two hawksbill turtles peel off to either side of me; ahead, silvery fish swirl into a shimmering vortex. Lacy purple sea fans and red antlers of living coral undulate in the current; barrel-shaped sponges pulse in jewel hues of ruby, emerald, amber. The cracks and crevices of this vertical wall teem with tiny fish, waving like colorful flags of unknown countries. I halt my descent at 60 feet—my depth limit—and take it all in. Dive



We bounce up to a wood-battered resort shrouded in sea grape and casuarina trees and festooned with drying wet suits.

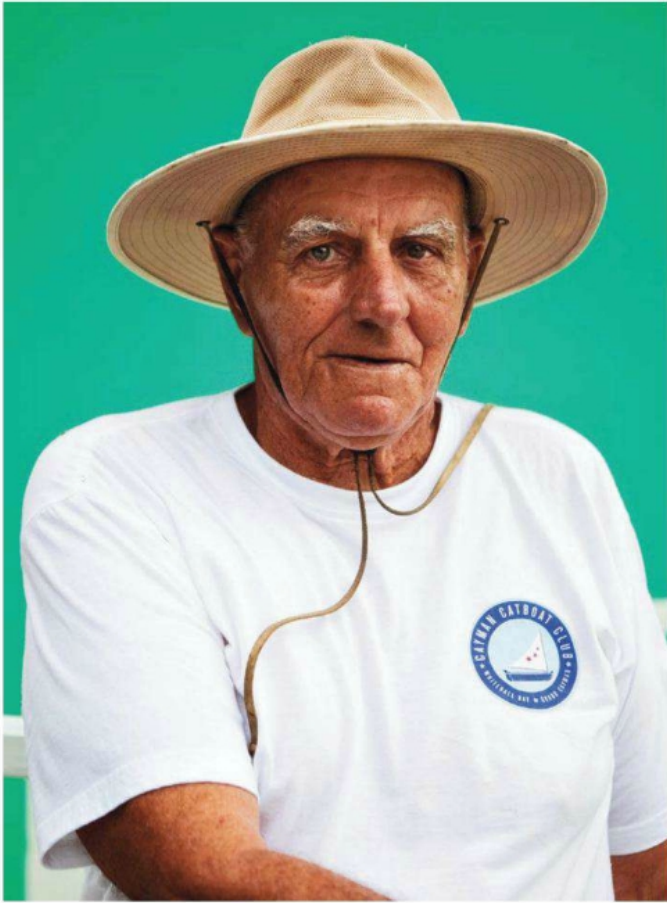
"After my divorce, I spent six years looking for a place where I could dive and cook," says Howard. "I arrived here on Memorial Day, 1986. After two dives, I realized this was the best diving in the Caribbean, so I swapped a horse pasture in Texas for a six-room, termite-infested hotel. I had to completely rebuild it." No easy task on an island without electricity at the time, and with a resident population of 12. (It has since ballooned to 100.) "Two years after I bought the place, Hurricane Gilbert turned it into splinters, so I had to rebuild again. When my tax accountant told me it was time to walk away, I added four more rooms," she says, laughing.

She lets me off at my bungalow, a large, rattan-furnished abode where the rattle of surf wafts through the wooden louvers. Outside, a hammock sways invitingly, but I hear someone banging on a scuba tank—the lunch bell. I pass through the plank-walled bar, threading between domino tables and driftwood sculptures, and grab a spot at one of the communal dining tables. The interior design may be more *Gilligan's Island* than Philippe Starck, but it quickly becomes apparent this is a clubhouse for the world's elite divers.



Young beachgoers (above) walk the shore at Rum Point, a water-sport destination on Grand Cayman. Paradise Restaurant by the Sea (below), on Grand Cayman, serves up Caribbean sunsets. Signs at Rum Point (opposite) honor a Caribbean tradition.





instructor Vallee points out the micro-life—brittle stars, pipefish, whiskered shrimp. None of these creatures seems very shy, perhaps emboldened by living in one of the oldest marine parks in the Caribbean, protected since 1986. As I kick up, I can't imagine ever matching the pure exhilaration of this experience.

"It's a universe as deep and mysterious as the night sky," I say when Howard asks about my dive back at Pirates Point over a group meal of herb-crusted ahi. Howard is a Cordon Bleu-trained chef; the cuisine at Pirates Point, now executed by chef Jeff Papendick, is fabled. Free of kitchen duties, Howard entertains at the head of the table, recounting everything from her fondness for her pet iguana, Handbag, to the proper way to extract a conch from its shell, to what I can look forward to the next day on Grand Cayman, the final leg of my trip.

"It has all the tourist stuff we don't: big resorts, booze cruises, sightseeing submarines. It can be a shock, coming from here. If you miss us, just go to the Queen Elizabeth II Botanic Park. It has a section filled with Little Cayman endemics we brought over there."

TWENTY MINUTES INTO THE FLIGHT across the wind-flecked waters of the Caribbean Sea, the plane tilts over the instantly recognizable coast of Grand Cayman, ringed with development, like a sold-out Monopoly board. Large hotels and condominiums cluster along a curving arc of sand. "That must be Seven Mile Beach," I yell to the passenger next to me. As the plane descends, I feel like an astronaut rocketing back to Earth after a sojourn to distant planets.

Reentry into civilization is at the wheel of a rental car. I scout out George Town and its harbor front, where century-old bonnet-roofed buildings stand near Jimmy Buffett's Margaritaville, duty-free shops, and Ugland House, a low office building sheltering more than 18,000 offshore companies. Spooling out beyond is Seven Mile Beach, with its nonstop run of condos and resorts.

"This all began with turtles," Tim Adam says. Adam directs the government-owned Turtle Farm, which he is showing off to me. "Columbus named these islands Las Tortugas—the turtles—because there were so many, they looked like rocks in the water," he explains as we skirt a basin holding turtle hatchlings. The hunting and selling of turtles sustained Caymanians through centuries of hardship. "They're on our flag, on our postage stamps—they're in our DNA." Adam should know. A silver-haired Pierce Brosnan look-alike, Adam traces his ancestry to one of the islands' first inhabitants, a Mr. Bodden. (Just about every Caymanian, black, white, or merely well tanned, seems related to these early settlers.)

The harvesting of turtles isn't something that the Turtle Farm advertises. It does tout that it has released more than 31,000 green turtles into the wild since 1968, subsidized by visitors who tour the breeding ponds and plunge into a pool to view barracuda and sharks through an underwater window.

Another reptile takes the stage at the Queen Elizabeth II Botanic Park, 65 acres of floral gardens, tropical trees, and medicinal plants on the other side of the island. Strolling along a woodland trail, my footfalls muffled by wet leaves, I hear squawking parrots and cooing doves. Immersed in this peaceful setting, I'm spooked when I see two tongue-flicking, four-foot-long iguanas just yards ahead. As startling as their size is their color: a bold turquoise blue.

"They've been here more than two million years and live exclusively on Grand Cayman," says Fred Burton, a slim Englishman who directs the Blue Iguana Recovery Programme. "By 2002 they were functionally extinct, victims of habitat destruction and feral cats and dogs."

A captive-breeding program in the park has resulted in a singular success story in this age of extinctions. Breeding pens, guarded by security cameras, help protect juvenile blue iguanas during their first two years of life, after which they're implanted with microchips and released onto hundreds of acres of protected island shrubland.

"We have about 750 in the wild," Burton explains. "Once we get to 1,000 and can confirm that the population is sustaining itself, we no longer will need to captive-release."

"In my boy days, we left the iguanas alone," says 74-year-old Kem Jackson, his blue eyes shielded by a pair of unruly silver eyebrows. I meet him during dinner at Vivine's Kitchen, on the island's East End. "Iguanas just aren't good eating." And good eating has brought us to Vivine's, where hammocks swing in the breeze and a wayward clock is set to island time. Jackson and his wife make the hour-long drive here because the fish is still cooked the Caymanian way, in fresh coconut milk, and comes with yams, honey-glazed plantains, and breadfruit. This is comfort food they remember from childhood.

"Times are better now," says Jackson, who went to sea as a potato peeler and now lives in a very comfortable house. "But the old days weren't so bad. We didn't know about electricity or television, but we had all the lobster, whelk, and turtle we needed."

Listening to Jackson, I'm realizing that while Grand Cayman has packaged itself successfully for general consumption, I'm after a more Caymanian moment. Jackson, one of the island's last master boatbuilders, knows just the thing.

The following morning, we're tacking across North Sound in a



sky blue Cayman catboat, one of only seven remaining here. Once considered the pickup truck of the Cayman Islands, the catboat harks to something authentic, even if our billowing sail now is made of Dacron instead of a patchwork of Gold Medal flour sacks. Because the boat lacks a weighted keel, its stability comes with the sailor sprawling on a wood plank over the water—a deadly game of nautical teeter-totter when you're 50 miles offshore. Luckily we're in protected waters, laying down a bubbly wake, as Jackson steers turtler style, the tiller rope wrapped around his big toe. Turning in the freshening breeze, he inquires, "What kind of cap'n you is?"

Taking a tiller rope in each hand, I follow Jackson's advice—don't work the boat, work *with* the boat—but I hardly have to steer at all. This handcrafted vessel has a life of its own. As we race across the sound, I feel the exhilaration of a Caymanian heading out to sea.

Back at the dock, Jackson asks where I've already visited.

"Ah, Lil' Cayman and the Brac," he says. "That's how it was here."

The nostalgia in his voice is tempered by an acceptance that the modern world has brought its own comforts. There is no going back, but that's okay. Any way you look at it, what one isle here lacks, the other two make up for. That's the beauty of things that, like the Cayman Islands, come in threes.

Contributing editor CHARLES KULANDER travels the world from his home in Moab, Utah. North Carolina-based photographer CHRIS BICKFORD shot "Hawaii, Lost and Found" (September 2011).

A catboat heels in big winds (left). Cayman Catboat Club member Kem Jackson readies for a sail (top left). A scarlet ibis stands in Grand Cayman's botanic park (top right).



License to

Jaw-dropping, hair-raising, even gravity-defying. These 10 drives bring out all the clichés

by Freda Moon

o Thrill

*Road-trippers view
Peyto Lake from a
scenic overlook off
Canada's Icefields
Parkway.*



Ribbon in the sky: Sight lines extend indefinitely along the Blue Ridge Parkway (opposite and below) in Virginia and North Carolina. Bolivia's infamous North Yungas Road (right) pairs steep drop-offs with sharp turns.

Virginia - North Carolina TANGLED UP IN BLUE

Spanning two states and 469 miles without a single stop sign or traffic light, the winding **Blue Ridge Parkway** unspools along ridgetops, into fertile valleys, and past the highest peak east of the Mississippi (Mount Mitchell) as it links Waynesboro, Virginia, in the Shenandoah Mountains to Cherokee, North Carolina, in the Great Smoky Mountains. "If your bladder could hold out and you have enough gas, you could drive the entire length of it without ever stopping," says Dan Brown, a retired superintendent of the popular parkway.

Of course, farms, fields, and small towns offer plenty of diversions worth braking for, and most people linger longer than one day. They climb Sharp Top Mountain in Virginia, as Thomas Jefferson once did, eat cornmeal cakes at the historic Mabry Mill, or wander beneath the white oaks, red maples, mountain magnolias, black cherries, and tulip poplars at Flat Top Manor, gorging themselves on bluegrass music and Americana.

Backstory: The ridge's name comes from the soft blue haze that seems to wrap the mountains from a distance. **Inside track:** Famous for the high drama of its fall foliage, the route inspires no less awe the rest of the year, insists Brown—from spring's blooming blankets of wild ginger, trout lily, and jack-in-the-pulpit wildflowers and budding trees to the summer's "plush southern Appalachian landscape" of verdant green, as well as the "bleak," beautiful winter.



Bolivia DRIVING BY A THREAD

For some 65 miles in the Bolivian highlands, little more than a lane separates drivers from skydivers. **North Yungas Road**, including a 25-mile pass marked with memorial crosses known as the Death Road, leads from the outskirts of La Paz—the world's highest capital—to the small town of Coroico. A nearby paved bypass completed in recent years provides a safer alternative, but mountain bikers and others who dare to take the old Death Road begin their white-knuckled adventure through the pass of La Cumbre on a barren 15,255-foot ridge. Glimpses across the valley offer vivid reminders of their precarious position up a vertical wall. Finally, the path descends into a humidity-choked haze of enormous palm fronds and wild coca bushes, teeming insects, and farms cultivating coffee and citrus.

Backstory: In the mid-1990s, the unprotected precipice earned notoriety as the most dangerous road in the world. **Inside track:** "It's extremely narrow," says Dan Grec, a Canadian traveler who recently road-tripped from Alaska to Argentina. "There are plenty of places where, if you came across an oncoming car, you would have to reverse and figure out how far back to go until you could fit past each other."







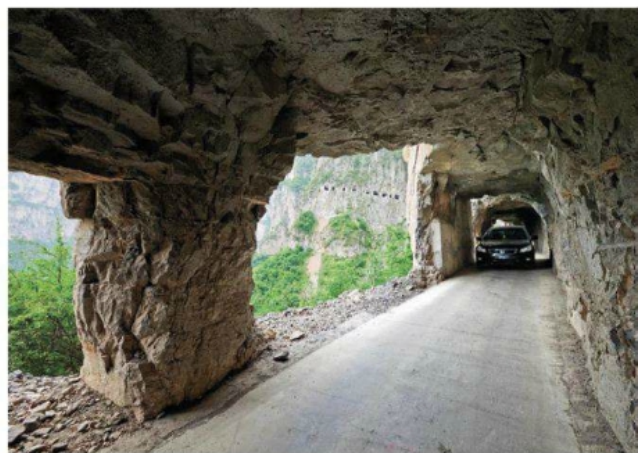
VIEW STOCK REF/AGE FOTOSTOCK (BOTH PHOTOS)

China

MISSION IMPOSSIBLE

In 1972, after centuries of isolation, the villagers of Guoliang decided to forge their own route to the outside world. Deep in the Taihang Mountains in northeastern China, they had long relied on a steep mountain trail sometimes referred to as a “heaven ladder.” Then 12 local men hand-carved a rough recess through the mountain. The **Guoliang Tunnel Road** (officially known as the Precipice Long Corridor) is that marvel of human will. To drive through the corridor requires a similar level of resolve. Tucked away in a remote corner of the country, west of Beijing, the passageway is hard to find. But those who have made the journey describe it as an exceptional sight. Just 19 feet wide and 13 feet high, the twisting tunnel has rough, open “windows” peering out from the cliff’s smooth rock face and down hundreds of feet to the gorge below.

Backstory: According to a plaque at its entrance, the nearly mile-long tunnel took six years to dig, the only tools being eight-pound hammers and steel drill rods. **Inside track:** “While I traversed the tunnel, I had an uneasy feeling it might collapse,” says Darren Crawford, a traveler from Nottingham, England. The rock walls are badly cracked, with chicken wire at the entrance. Drivers are wise to turn on their headlights and honk their horns as they pass through.



China’s Guoliang Tunnel cuts through the rocky Taihang Mountains (left), with jagged openings (above) fronting a steep gorge.



Road warriors: Travelers on Austria's Grossglockner High Alpine Road (above) head for its highest vantage point, Edelweiss-Spitze. Right: Near Queenstown, on the South Island of New Zealand, the highway traces Lake Wakatipu in the shape of a lightning bolt.

Austria

VERTICAL PLAYGROUND

Classic BMWs and roadsters zoom around 36 curves—which climb nearly 3,000 feet to a dizzying 8,215-foot vantage in just under 30 miles—on the **Grossglockner High Alpine Road** between the Austrian states of Salzburg and Carinthia. Overhead, griffon vultures and golden eagles circle the Alpine peaks, where rare ibex and chamois roughhouse and pudgy marmots scurry among resurgent populations of brown bears and wolves.

“If you have blue sky, it’s just out of this world,” says Johannes P. Hofer, an Austrian native who has lived in New York for decades but returns to Zell am See each year. “There’s never a visit when I don’t go up on this road”—if he can arrange it, behind the steering wheel of a borrowed convertible. The icing on top (other than the actual glacial glaze)? The joyride delivers drivers to the wilds of Hohe Tauern National Park, the largest

nature reserve in the Alps and a magnet for hikers, cyclists, and snowshoers. **Backstory:** Named for the 12,460-foot Grossglockner, highest in the Austrian Alps, the serpentine road was completed in 1935 and built on the traces of bridle paths and ancient Celtic and Roman trails. **Inside track:** The Grossglockner charges a toll (around \$43). Between May and November, the road accesses the Kaiser-Franz-Josefs-Höhe visitors center, where a funicular shuttles passengers to an overlook of the colossal Pasterze Glacier.

New Zealand

NEED FOR SPEED

The southwest corner of New Zealand’s South Island poses the best kind of driver’s dilemma: Wide-open roads, most famously the **Milford Road** (aka Highway 94), beg for velocity but also demand constant rubbernecking. From Queenstown, on



Lake Wakatipu, a circuitous journey on state highways proves a worthy prelude to the glacier-carved Milford Sound. Like a drumroll, the final 75 miles on 94 travel through rain forests, around the perpetually white-capped Ailsa mountains, along the shores of Lake Te Anau, to the mirror-like, tea-colored water of the fjord. There, 150 or so residents live among a marine reserve for penguins, dolphins, and New Zealand fur seals. But for all the region's eye-widening allure, it's hard not to let your inner drag racer out to play. Exceeding the speed limit (62 miles an hour) is tempting, says Melissa Antonelli, a Seattleite who lived in New Zealand and learned so firsthand. It was "just me and the mountains and a beautiful running river," says Antonelli of the largely unpopulated rural Fiordland region. "Then the cops came and gave me a speeding ticket, and I thought, 'Where were you? There's nobody else around.'" **Backstory:** Rudyard Kipling once described Milford Sound as the "eighth wonder of the world." The Maori named it for the *piopio*, a native bird that's now

extinct. **Inside track:** The Milford Road eventually meets the Avenue of the Disappearing Mountain, where an optical illusion makes the peak appear to shrink as people approach it. Drivers stop at Lake Gunn for a short nature loop.





Proper topper: Capped with a green-tile roof on the summit of Oregon's Crown Point, the Vista House opened in 1918 as a rest stop along the Columbia River Highway.

Oregon A WRINKLE IN TIME

Long ago bypassed by an interstate, the skinny two-lane **Historic Columbia River Highway**, poised on the side of the Columbia River Gorge, has seen little change since it was completed in 1922. Traveling from one small Oregon town (Corbett) to another (Dodson) a mere 15 miles away, the road's most popular remaining portion takes in six state parks, seven waterfalls, and, on clear days, views of five mountain peaks, including the explosive Mount St. Helens. "To take that old highway is like stepping back in time," says Darren White, a local fine-art photographer. During the silver thaw of winter, its famous waterfalls freeze and icicles as thick as tree

branches hang from the highway's graceful arched bridges. Spring and early summer pop with blooming endemic wildflowers—including the fuchsia-and-yellow poet's shooting star and white-petaled Columbia Gorge daisy, and the Oregon ash and cottonwood trees grow dense with green. In the fall, the road slips under a fiery awning of oranges, reds, and yellows. **Backstory:** The first planned scenic byway in the U.S. follows strict design protocols (for example, no grades steeper than 5 percent) inspired by Switzerland's 19th-century Axenstrasse byway. **Inside track:** At Crown Point, drivers stop at the Vista House, an elegant art nouveau observatory 733 feet above the Columbia River. Samuel Lancaster, the Multnomah County engineer who oversaw the highway's development, said that from this perch the river "could be viewed in silent communion with the infinite."

Romania HEART OF DARKNESS

Measured by chills down the spine, the twists and drops of Romania's **Transfăgărășan Road** pack a more fearsome punch than the Transylvanian Alps' most famous former resident, Vlad III the Impaler, the Walachian prince who inspired Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. "You see crucifixes on the side of the road, and you dread to think what [the driver] must have gone through—it's a sheer drop," says Paul White, a British expat living in the nearby countryside who writes a blog called Wild Transylvania.

Winding north-south between Romania's two top peaks and reaching more than a mile high, the Transfăgărășan follows the Argeș River, skirts the crescent-shaped rim of Vidraru Dam, and visits the banks of the emerald Vidraru Lake. Along the two-lane road (speed limit: 25 miles an hour), drivers cross 27 bridges and aqueducts and navigate an unlit, half-mile-long tunnel—as well as around shepherds and their flocks holding up traffic. Tourists stop at the ruins of 700-year-old Poenari Castle, Dracula's onetime home atop some 1,480 stairs in the Arefu commune. **Backstory:** High in the Făgăraș Mountains of the southern Carpathians (another name for the Transylvanian Alps), the road was built in the 1970s as a strategic 100-mile military route. **Inside track:** Often treacherous weather conditions mean the road is reliably open only from late June through mid-October; during cold months, the road becomes inaccessible beyond the Bâlea waterfall, a 20-story chain of cascades. From there, a red cable car whisks travelers to Bâlea Lake, with two year-round chalets and an ice hotel built from scratch each winter.

Driven to extremes: The Trans-Andean Highway between Argentina and Chile covers disparate landscapes (above). Romania's perilous Transfăgărășan Road offers bright spots, too, such as nearby Pitești's tulip festival full of folk costumes (below).



Chile - Argentina DANGEROUS CURVES AHEAD

The Trans-Andean Highway delivers more thrills than a theme park, coiling along 226 miles of mountain passes between the booming Chilean capital of Santiago and Mendoza wine country in the foothills of western Argentina. A defunct railway tracing part of the route only adds to the roller-coaster effect. As one of the major thoroughfares of the continent's Southern Cone, the road is as seductive to sightseers as it is crucial to commerce, with semitrailers as well as international buses gunning it up 29 rapid-fire switchbacks that climb to some 11,500 feet on the Chilean side of the Andes.

At Christ the Redeemer International Pass—named for a four-ton statue placed there in 1904—a nearly two-mile-long tunnel cuts through the rugged mountains to a border crossing notorious for long lines and multihour delays. The tunnel also signals a striking divide. "In one trip, you have two totally separate ecosystems," says U.S. expat Cary Gilbert, who manages a Mendoza restaurant. On the Argentine side, "it's desert, with beautiful rock formations in all different colors. Then you come out the Chilean side, and everything's green." **Backstory:** Locals call the crawl through the Andes the Paso de los Caracoles—"snails' pass." **Inside track:** From the Argentine side of the tunnel, drivers can glimpse four-mile-high Mount Aconcagua, the tallest peak in the Western Hemisphere.





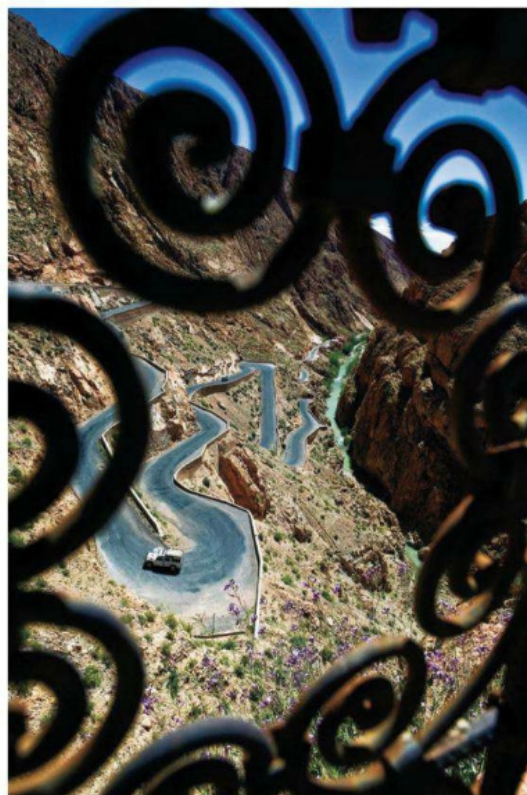
Diamonds in the rough: Morocco's zigzaggy Atlas Mountain Road descends into Dades Valley (right). Canada's Icefields Parkway (below) passes mountain-flanked Moraine Lake (opposite)—the sight of which became known as the "Twenty Dollar View" after an illustration of the scene appeared on a Canadian bank note.

Canada

WHERE THE WILD THINGS ARE

On the 144-mile **Icefields Parkway**, connecting Banff and Jasper National Parks, the quiet of the Canadian Rockies runs as deep as the region's many glacier-fed lakes. Yet loneliness scarcely stands a chance. Here, titans of the Great White North—from bighorn sheep, caribou, and moose to grizzlies and black bears—embody the beasts of childhood fantasies; then, every so often, into the scene waltzes a creature looking straight out of a Dr. Seuss book. Local tour agent Mirit Poznansky drives the highway regularly, but a recent, rare sighting of the shy Canadian lynx, a wild cat with peculiar pointed tufts on its ears, stopped her in her tracks. The dreamscape is full of those pinch-me moments, perhaps none more surreal than the crystalline inverted landscapes reflected in the parkway's lakes, each famous for having a distinctive hue, such as the turquoise of Bow Lake and the emerald of Lake Louise.

Backstory: Built during the Great Depression, the byway opened in 1940 as a single lane of gravel, upgraded in later decades. At roughly the halfway point, a massive expanse of interconnected glaciers called the Columbia Icefield sits on a triple divide. Its snowmelt feeds into the Pacific, Atlantic, and Arctic Oceans. **Inside track:** "The only time you get a traffic jam is if there's a bear on the side of the road," says Poznansky. "We call those bear jams."



Morocco

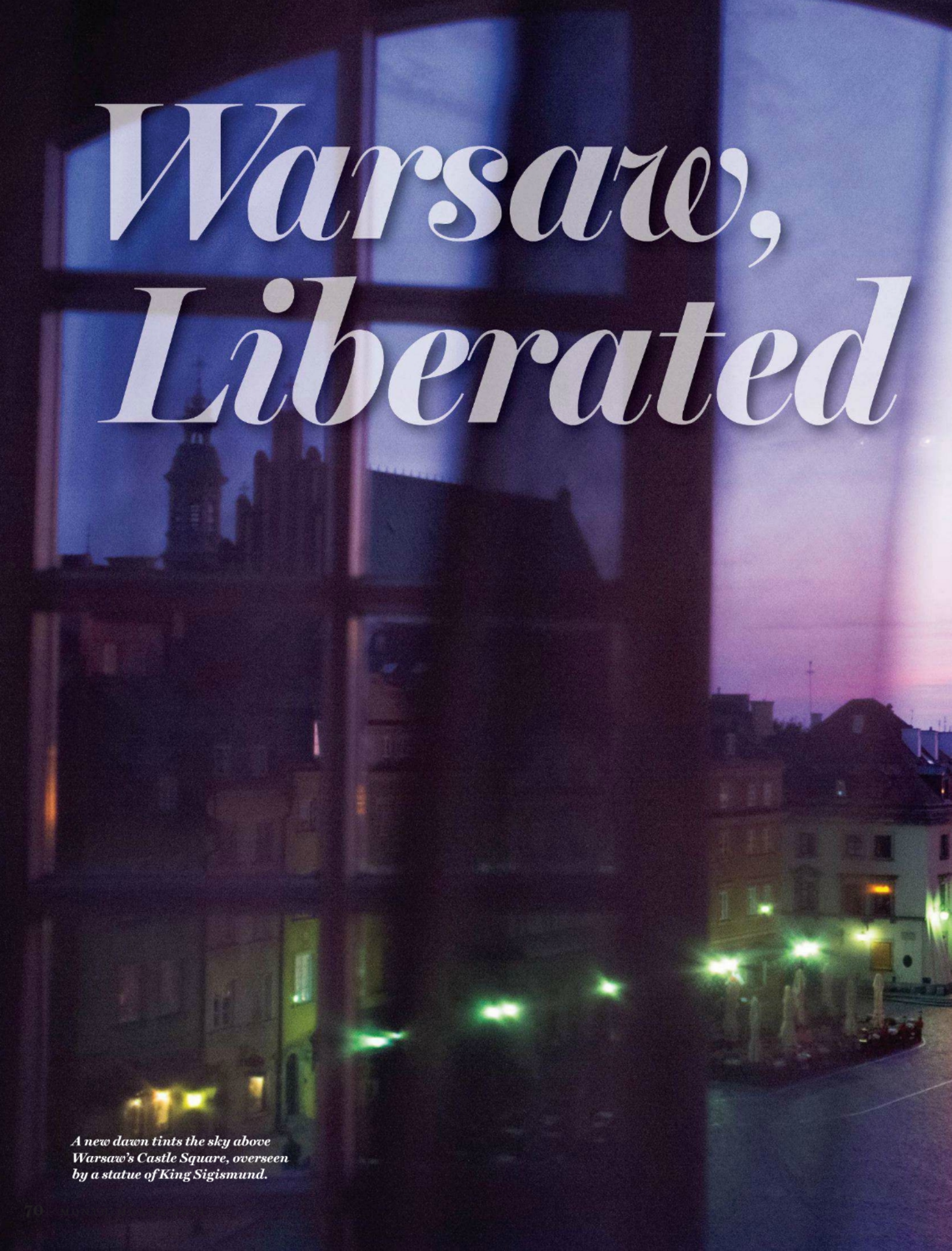
MAGIC CARPET RIDE

Like a Formula 1 circuit without the safety checks, Morocco's **Atlas Mountain Road** tests drivers' mettle. Carved into the spine of northwest Africa, the 117-mile route can take several hours, with two narrow and guardrail-free lanes snaking around too many blind curves to count. "You go whooshing around 200- or 250-degree turns," says David Wisner, a former teacher in Tangier. Here the grand prize is the otherworldly landscape seen from the Tizi-n'Tichka Pass as the road climbs more than 6,000 feet from ancient Marrakech, over the High Atlas Mountains, then back down to the desert oasis of Ouarzazate (the "Hollywood of the Maghreb," the filming location for *Lawrence of Arabia* a half century ago). Along the way, obstacles range from unpredictable surface conditions to goats, camels, and mules blocking the road.

Backstory: The French Foreign Legion constructed this byway in 1936 on the path that explorer turned priest Charles de Foucauld documented in the 1880s. **Inside track:** Telouet, the decaying capital of what was French Southern Morocco, features the once grand casbah of T'hami el Glaoui, who ruled the region in the early 20th century.

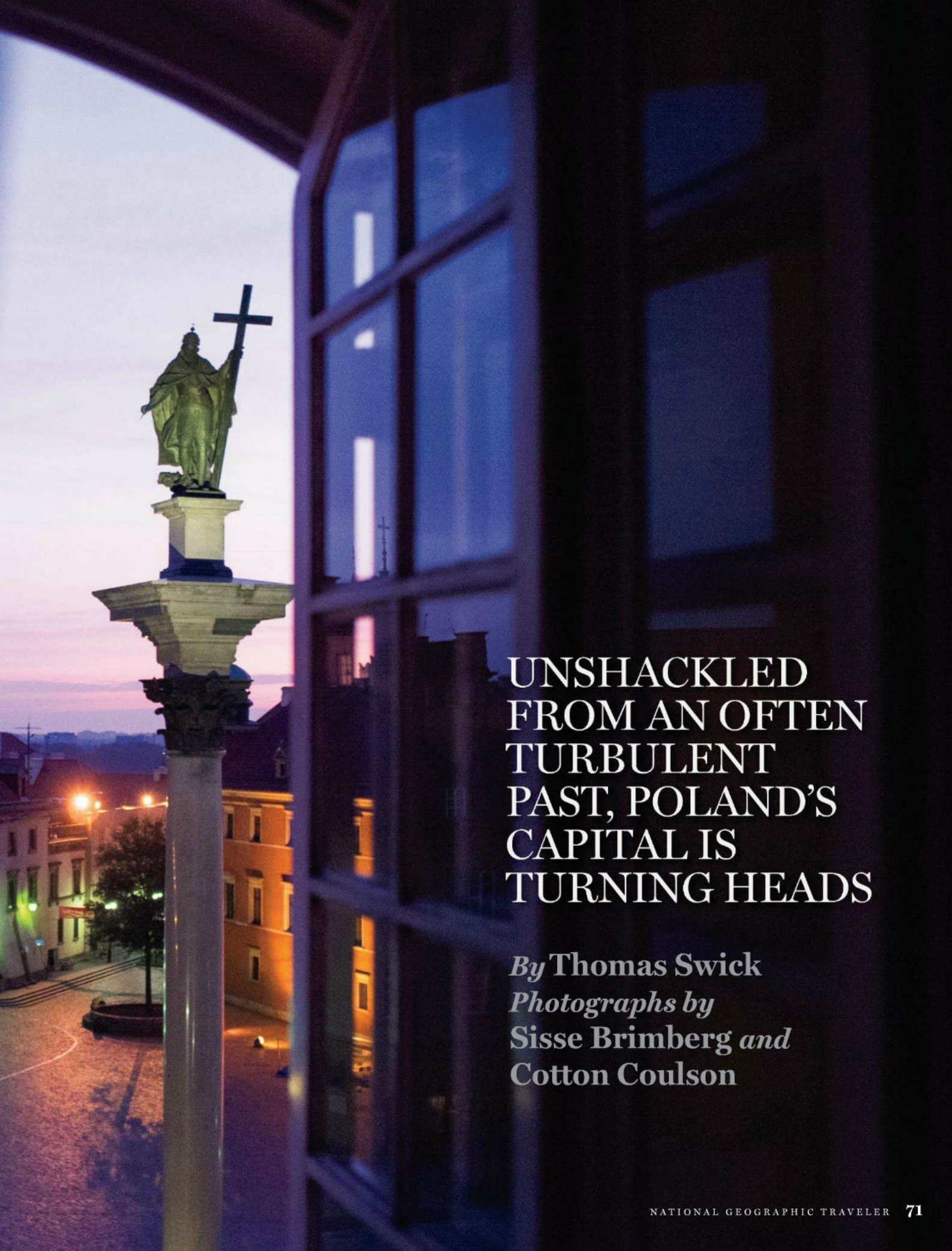
FREDA MOON has road-tripped extensively through the Americas, including Bolivia's Death Road.





Warsaw, Liberated

*A new dawn tints the sky above
Warsaw's Castle Square, overseen
by a statue of King Sigismund.*

A photograph of the Copernicus Monument in Warsaw at dusk, viewed through a window. The monument, a bronze statue of Copernicus holding a cross, stands on a tall column. The background shows a city street with lights and buildings under a twilight sky. The window through which the scene is viewed has a dark frame with multiple panes.

UNSHACKLED FROM AN OFTEN TURBULENT PAST, POLAND'S CAPITAL IS TURNING HEADS

By Thomas Swick
Photographs by
Sisse Brimberg *and*
Cotton Coulson

It's 1979,

a cold, gray February day in Warsaw, Poland's capital. I'm led into a room. A man sits behind a desk with nothing on it but a telephone. This seems strange for an official dealing with visas, whom I'm asking to extend mine.

"If you help us," the man says to me purposefully, in accented English, "we can help you."

My immediate thought is: He didn't just say what I think he said. My second: This only happens in movies.

I ask him what he means. If I come to his office once a week, he explains, and report what people are saying, I can get an indefinite extension of my visa. The work, he adds, isn't that different from the journalism I practiced in the States.

If I weren't in shock, I would laugh in his face. I decline his offer—and now have to leave the country.

I had moved to Warsaw, then part of the Communist bloc, in

1978 to be with my Warsaw-born girlfriend, Hania, whom I'd met in London. Armed with a six-month visa, I'd found work teaching English to students who were bright and curious. The day before my non-renewed visa expired, I departed, filled with disappointment but with a Cold War story to tell.

Three decades later, I'm back. On a sunny June afternoon I'm walking what may be the world's most perfect avenue, Krakowskie Przedmieście. It certainly is Warsaw's. Part of the "Royal Route" linking the city's castle with the equally regal Wilanów Palace, it looks better than ever. In the space of a few blocks I spot the classic elements of a great urban boulevard: shops, galleries, restaurants,





Big bubbles form a soapy rainbow in Market Square (above), a medieval landmark destroyed in World War II and carefully rebuilt. Military officials participate in a commemoration (opposite) of Warsaw's resistance movement in World War II.

historic residences (including the president's), a grand hotel, a fine university, storied churches, green spaces, and heroic statuary that honors, among others, a prince, a poet, and an astronomer. Infinitely cozier than New York's Fifth Avenue and much more varied than Paris's regimented Champs-Élysées, Krakowskie Przedmieście goes beyond being a thoroughfare: It is Poland, distilled.

Now, walking with summery crowds, overhearing smatterings of Italian and French and English, I cast back to that earlier time, when the avenue was my refuge from the drab city beyond. Warsaw was leveled by the Nazis in World War II, then rebuilt during the communist era, about as tragic a fate as a city could have. Among the few buildings to survive was Warsaw's most elegant hotel, now the Hotel Bristol Warsaw, which served as a hospital for German soldiers. I step into its art nouveau lobby and look for the entrance to a well-known Warsaw watering hole: the Column Bar, where Poland's high society—including composer, pianist, and Prime Minister Ignacy Jan Paderewski—mingled during the hotel's 1920s heyday. Punctuated by six fluted columns, the bar still draws the well-heeled.

"I USED TO REALLY HATE WARSAW," Noemi Gadomska says to me emphatically. We're sitting at a sidewalk café on Plac Konstytucji, a Stalin-era square south of Krakowskie Przedmieście. Looking around, I see buildings decorated with reliefs of heroic socialist workers, which have taken on a kind of period charm now that the ideology they stood for has been sent packing. Gadomska, the daughter of a friend of a friend and a recent high school graduate, is looking for a summer job, not abroad—as generations of Poles, like Hania, did—but in her hometown.

"I thought this city was so provincial," she continues. "Then I went to Ottawa to visit relatives. The grass there was cut so perfectly." Obsessive lawn care was novel to her—and symbolized, I suspect, a lack of imaginative spirit.

"Warsaw may be a mess," she adds, "but there is an authenticity here. Varsovians say what they think."

And there are more Varsovians than ever: The city today ranks ninth in population in the European Union—a remarkable turnaround for a place that lost 67 percent of its residents between 1939 and 1945. Also seeing an increase: the number of visitors to Warsaw, drawn by such attractions as the two-year-old Multimedia Fountain, one of the world's largest, which on Saturday nights in summer erupts in a play of sound, water, and light fueled by hundreds of nozzles and colored LED lights.

"Everyone says it's for tourists, but everyone I know has been to it," Gadomska observes, then mentions other magnets for visitors and locals: broad Marszałkowska avenue and its parade of clothing stores, the revitalized neighborhood of Praga—a working-class district across the Vistula River now popular with artists—and the new Copernicus Science Centre, where, Gadomska claims, you can learn the best position for making out inside a Polish Fiat.

As she talks, I think of how this city has transformed itself since 1980, when the birth of the Solidarity movement enabled me to

return after my abrupt exit, and Hania and I were married in the city's Old Town. But the transformation has to be truly astounding for those who knew Poland in the Soviet-dominated 1950s—the time when my wife's mother was hauled with other political activists into a Warsaw prison. A prison where detainees were tortured and, sometimes, executed. The prison where my wife was born.

IN 1951, A YOUTHFUL HALINA MATRAŚ was accused of being a spy for the anticommunist government-in-exile. Though pregnant, she was sentenced to ten years in Mokotów Prison. She gave birth to her daughter—my future wife—within its bleak walls. The baby was eventually taken away by Halina's sister; at three months, little Hania looked so sickly that on the tram, outraged mothers hurled abuse at her aunt. Halina was released after five years, during the period of de-Stalinization—but the years in confinement took a heavy toll.

I find Mokotów Prison on Rakowiecka Street, about three miles south of the Old Town. It's still a prison, but now mostly for short-term incarcerations. I read the plaque on the wall. Warsaw is full of

Because it was rebuilt, the Old Town is sometimes criticized for being Disneyesque. True, it's no longer the commercial heart of the city and, yes, it may have the feel of a tourist attraction more than of an urban center. But I marvel anew at how exquisitely detailed, faithfully rendered, and well trafficked this replica of the original is. Small, medieval-feeling shops sell artwork, ceramics, souvenirs, and local jewelry made with Baltic Sea amber. I enter one, aBo Art Gallery, and find a dog stretched out on the floor. The owner, Anna Bolesta, sits behind a desk. She tells me she lives in the quarter. The apartments are small, she admits, but her neighbors—artists, actors, writers—are interesting.

Bolesta speaks excellent English. Many young Varsovians now speak the language well. Some learned it while working abroad—in England, Ireland, the U.S.—and are putting it to good use in a new Poland that has lured them back.

"I have everything here," Bolesta says of the Old Town. "I don't need to leave." It sounds like life in a small village—a small village tucked inside a big city.

After a short walk I'm in Market Square (Rynek), for centuries the

Warsaw is full of plaques, everyday reminders of the suffering that has been inflicted on this city through the centuries.

plaques, most commemorating victims of war and totalitarianism; they're everyday reminders, often brightened with flowers, of the immense suffering that has been inflicted on this city through the centuries. The plaque on the prison wall carries names of the people who died inside during "the years of Communist terror... 1945-1955."

I think of the travails of those, such as my mother-in-law, who survived—and know it's time to find out more about this place. A few phone calls to old contacts, and I arrange to meet a woman who also spent time in Mokotów Prison; her apartment building is in the city center.

Retired literature professor Barbara Otwinowska greets me with a smile. Her tiny apartment is an oasis of refinement, lined with bookshelves and hung with landscape paintings, portraits, and a gold-framed mirror. Like the apartments of many older Varsovians, it's a rich representation of a rudely circumscribed life. Otwinowska and I sit at her book-piled table, eating lemon sorbet and chatting. Eventually, she tells me she knows a man at the Ministry of Justice who might be able to get us into the prison. We agree to meet there a few days later.

Back on the street, I realize I'm not far from Warsaw's medieval core, the Old Town—a crowning achievement of Polish historic reconstruction. Dating to the 1200s, this once was a place of richly appointed palaces and churches and guildhalls. Almost completely destroyed by the Nazis in World War II, it was rebuilt beginning in 1948 with such artisanship that it earned a designation as a World Heritage site in 1980.

I enter cobblestoned Castle Square to find protesters clamoring around the King Sigismund Column, a 17th-century memorial to the Polish king Sigismund III Vasa that doubles as a Warsaw landmark—and rallying point. Today young Syrians, who came to Poland to study and stayed on, shout through megaphones and wave Syrian flags. They confirm Warsaw's growing international status: This city traditionally known for producing emigrants is now receiving them.

city's center of commerce, where Warsaw's merchants and guilds set up shop. Café umbrellas cluster by the colorfully painted facades of baroque-style town houses. Children play in the central fountain, around a statue of Syrenka, the sword-bearing mermaid who is the symbol of Warsaw.

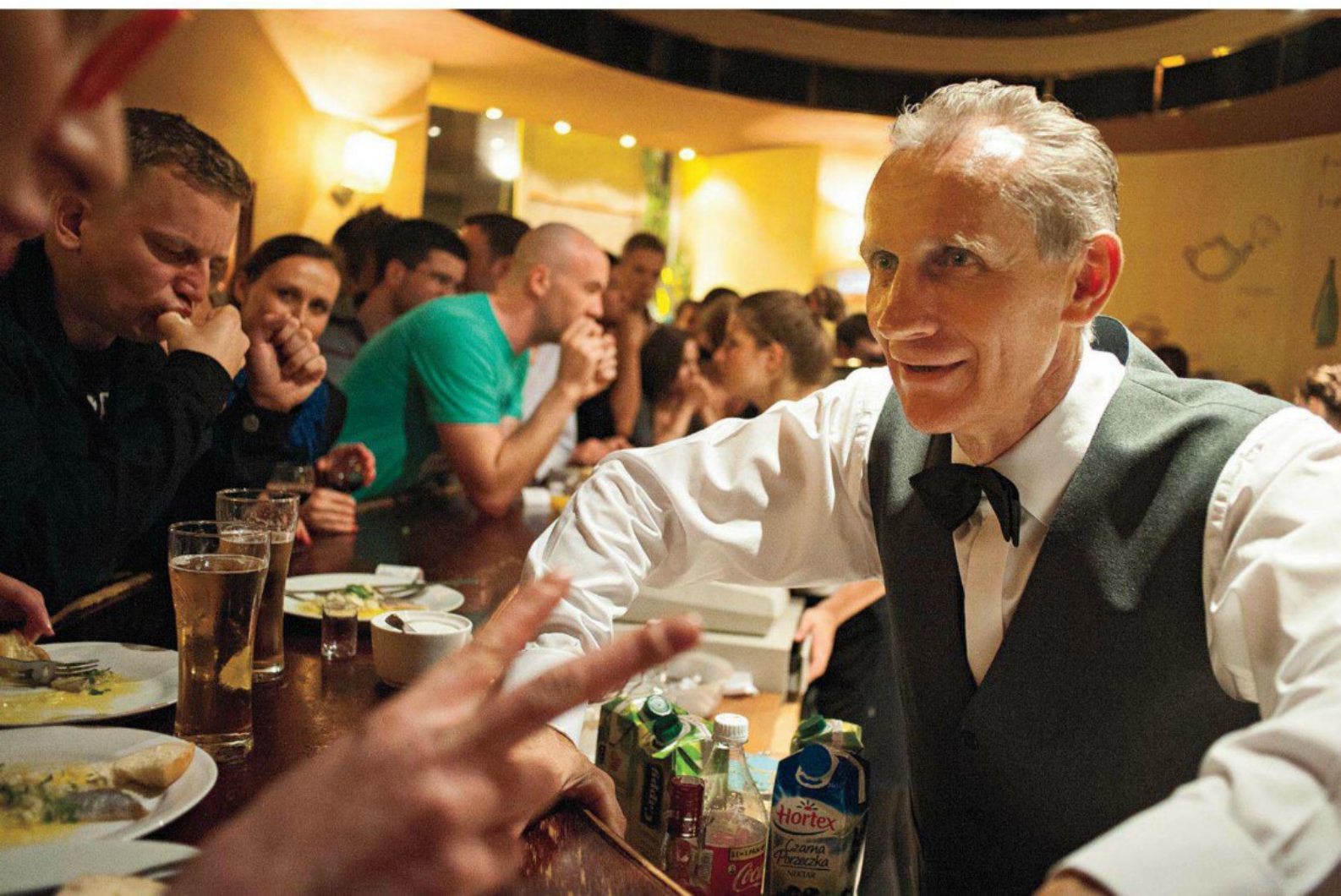
The square's many shops today are abuzz with visitors. I make my usual pilgrimage to Cepelia, a folk art gallery displaying a riot of painted wood carvings. Most are of single figures, including one of St. Francis of Assisi. But some are fantastic assemblages—a wedding party, a Noah's ark—carved from a single piece of wood. I recognize some of the artists by the shape of the eyes they carved (I have a modest collection at home). One work, titled "Christ Worrying," depicts the Savior seated on a stone, his head tilted wearily into his hand—an ancient image that seemed to take on new meaning during communist times. Many of the works contain a mixture of piety and humor that always strikes me as particularly Polish.

I manage to leave without adding a new piece to my collection and head north, past pierogi restaurants—the traditional dumpling dish is making a comeback—to the New Town, which is really the new Old Town. An independent settlement when it was established in the 1400s, it too was destroyed in World War II, then lovingly rebuilt to look the way it did during its prime in the 1700s. Because it has fewer shops and restaurants than the Old Town, it's less busy. I stroll through a tidy, unpeopled square, past the rebuilt baroque church of St. Kazimierz—where more than a thousand civilians died during a night of bombing in 1944—and under the open windows of apartments, arriving eventually at an overlook along the Vistula River. Life seems to have moved elsewhere; here there is a feeling of peace, solitude, timelessness. One doesn't think, "It's all a reconstruction." Instead, "How quietly beautiful this is—in the middle of a major European capital. At the beginning of the 21st century."

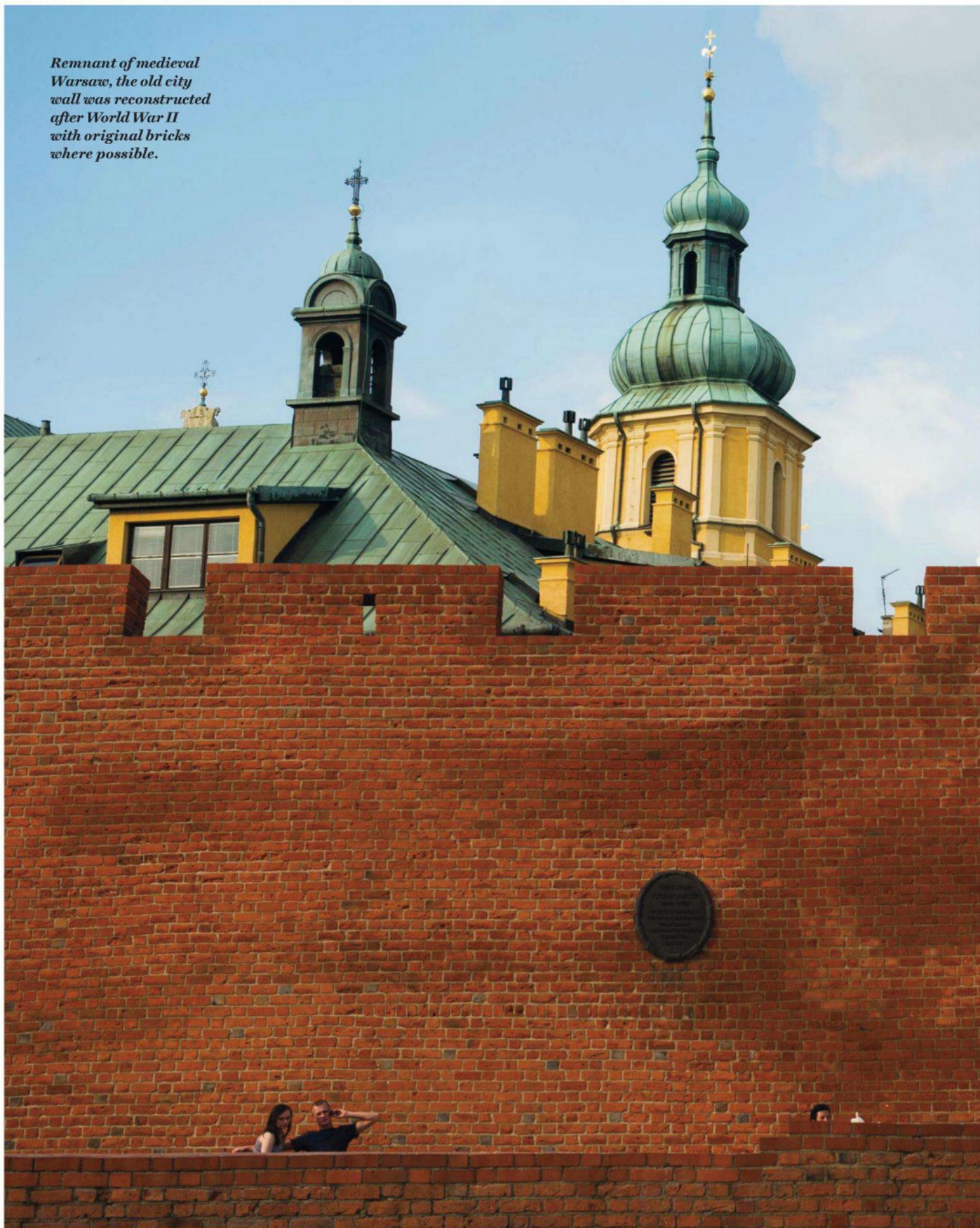
I'M ENJOYING A SOFT SUMMER EVENING when I meet up with Jerzy Thieme, my wife's cousin, for a walk through Pole Mokotowskie,



Clockwise from above: A visitor in Warsaw's Frédéric Chopin Museum shuffles up works by the composer in a music booth. Bartender Pan Roman takes orders in the restaurant Przekąski Zakąski. A couple lounges in a supersize art installation.



*Remnant of medieval
Warsaw, the old city
wall was reconstructed
after World War II
with original bricks
where possible.*





I think of how this city has transformed itself since 1980, when the birth of the Solidarity movement enabled me to return.

one of Warsaw's largest parks. The landscape is alive with people escaping their apartments. Most stroll, like us; others whiz by on bicycles. Some sit on picnic blankets eating open-faced sandwiches of cheese, tomato, kielbasa, ham. The late Polish writer Ryszard Kapuściński used to take his morning walks here, a sign informs us; his childhood home, on nearby Niepodległości street, may become a museum.

The truth is, Warsaw is a city of remembrances. Among the most powerful commemorations: the Warsaw Rising Museum, which documents the valiant yet doomed 1944 uprising of residents against Nazi occupation during World War II that led to a retaliatory leveling of much of the city. One can't begin to understand present-day

talk of the town when it opened in 2010. I have to put my hands over my ears as I approach children gleefully screaming into a box that records their decibels. Down the hall, two girls are fitting plastic body parts into an anatomy model. They grin when their father picks up the liver and says, "This hurts me all the time." I grin when I notice three preteens transfixed by the voice of an electronic poet, based on a character in a novel by the late Polish writer Stanisław Lem—an inspired teaming of technology and literature. The whole place has the air more of a fun house than a science center.

IT'S FRIDAY MORNING, and fun houses are the last thing on my mind. Professor Otwinowska and I are in the waiting room of

Mokotów Prison (now called Areszt Śledczy Warszawa-Mokotów). With the help of a Ministry of Justice official, I'm about to see my wife's birthplace.

"Nice to meet you," I say when the official arrives. His reply floors me: "We have already met. My name is Tomasz; I was one of your students."

Smiling, he leads us through a gate, where we relinquish our IDs and cell phones, and out into the prison yard. Otwinowska, elegant in her sun hat, clings to my arm as we enter the first building. I can only imagine what memories are coursing through her mind. We stop at a cell. Guards roust its two prisoners so we can have a look inside. Otwinowska spreads her arms to measure its width and declares it bigger than the one she lived in. And, of course, she had no TV.

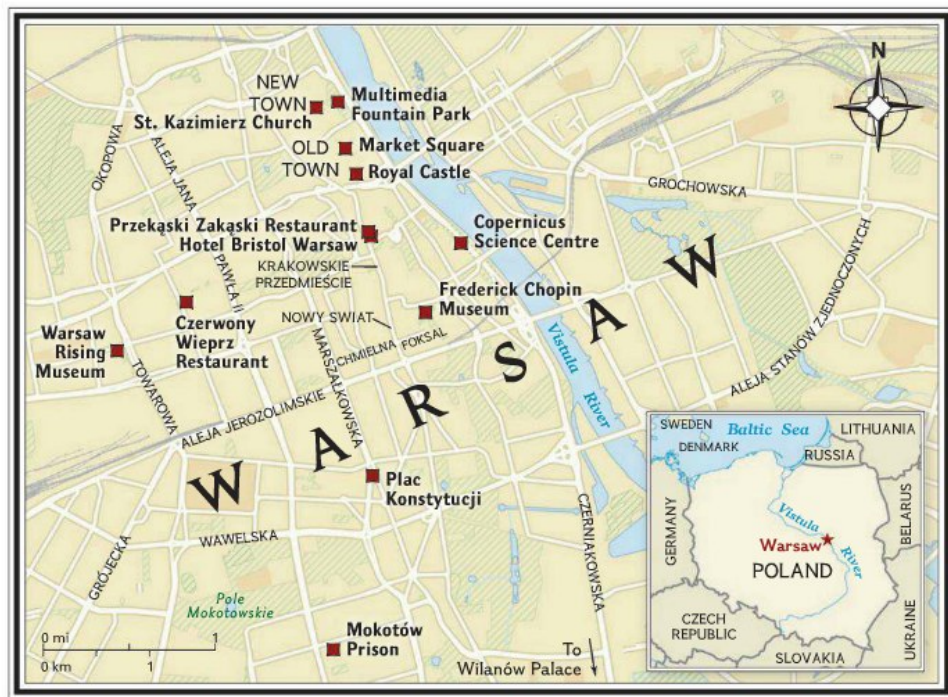
There is the sobering air of any correctional facility, but in here it is thickened by historical context. As we walk along the halls, I think of all the interrogations, hunger strikes, acts of torture, and executions that took place within these walls. All of the lives lost,

the productive years wasted. I think of all of the courageous citizens treated here as criminals, of the mothers separated from their babies. The babies separated from their mothers.

Our visit ends in the director's office. Bogdan Kornatowski is a tall, handsome man. He presents each of us with a glass etching of the old prison building. He talks with Otwinowska about upcoming events. Then he turns his gaze to me.

"What I am about to say may sound a bit strange," he begins, then pauses, searching for the right words. "Perhaps even ugly. But please tell your wife that she has best wishes from the director of the prison."

THOMAS SWICK is the author of the travel memoir *Unquiet Days: At Home in Poland*. Contributing photographers SISSE BRIMBERG and COTTON COULSON live in Glasgow, Scotland, and often cover Europe.



Warsaw without an appreciation of this event, in which more than 140,000 Varsovians died. The opening of the museum in 2004 represented a big victory, confirming that Poland had regained its freedom and, with it, possession of its national narrative. Inside, the museum is a triumph as well. Exhibits detail the immense challenges Warsaw's resistance fighters faced, including navigating the sewer system to move around the city undetected. Harrowing recordings of survivors' accounts give artifacts—Sten submachine guns, a Nazi motorcycle, a Kubus armored car cobbled together by the Polish Home Army on the chassis of a Chevrolet van—an unsettling reality.

Reality is challenged in an entirely different way at the state-of-the-art Copernicus Science Centre, down the hill from the Old Town, along the Vistula River. Named for Poland's pioneering astronomer Nicolaus Copernicus—who in the early 1500s posited that the sun, not Earth, was the center of the universe—the museum became the

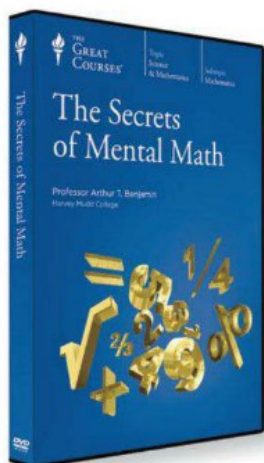


Diners at the restaurant Czerwony Wieprz (above) converse near a mural depicting notable Communist leaders, including Soviet head Leonid Brezhnev. Photos of former residents (below) peer down from an old ghetto building.



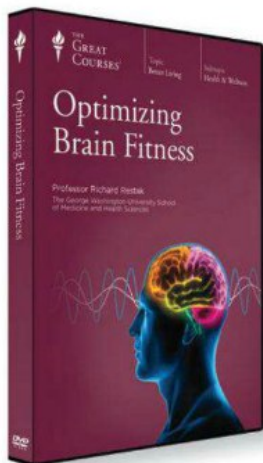


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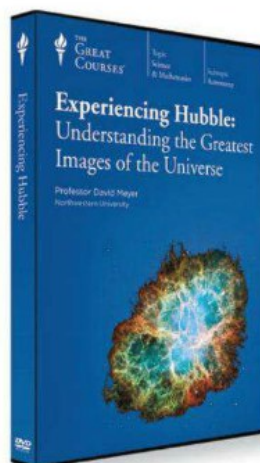
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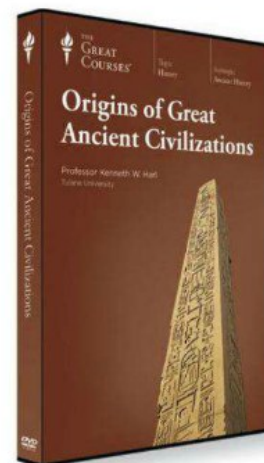
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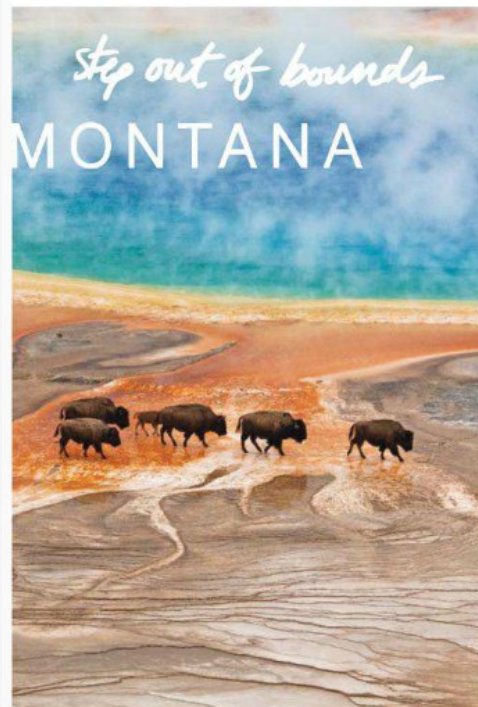
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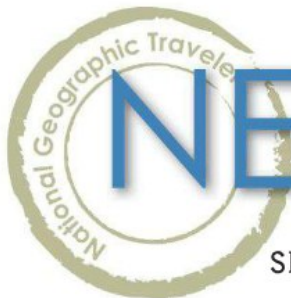


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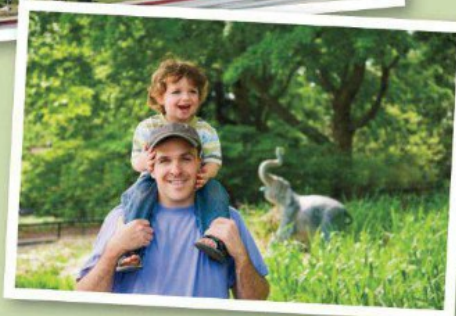
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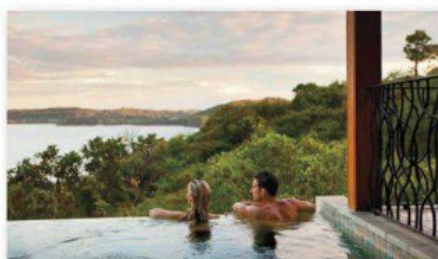
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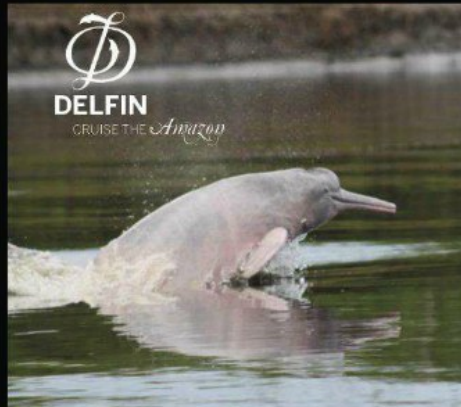
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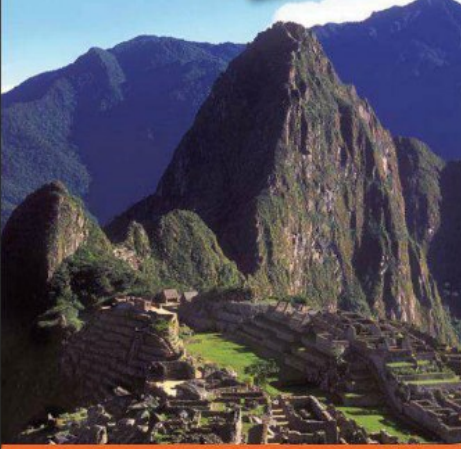
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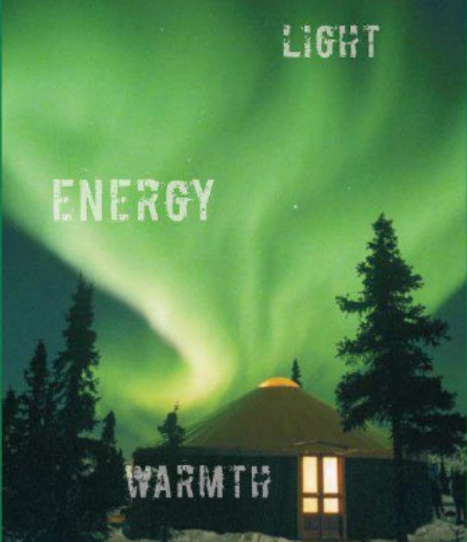


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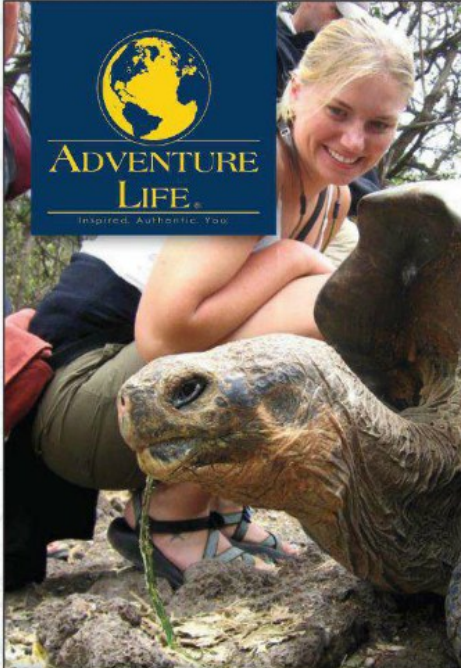


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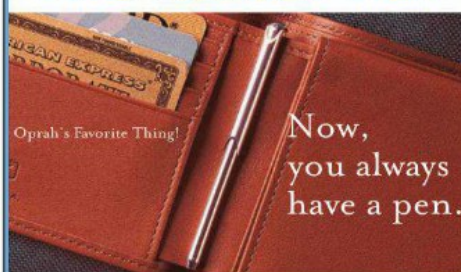
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Sistine Chapel

CONSECRATED TO THE VIRGIN MARY in 1483, the Vatican's Sistine Chapel was created by Renaissance men: Sixtus IV and Julius II, popes who commissioned its artworks in the late 15th and early 16th centuries, and the artists Sandro Botticelli, Pietro Perugino, and, most famously, Michelangelo, who transformed the chapel into a glory to behold. His frescoes, painted in bright colors to be visible from the floor, took four years, tormenting the artist, who penned a poem complaining of his aching spine. Completing the ceiling in 1512, he returned 24 years later to paint the "Last Judgment" on the altar wall. —ANDREW NELSON

WELL PLASTERED Michelangelo's ceiling has lost only one piece in 500 years. In 1797, an explosion from a nearby gunpowder depot caused a chunk of sky in "The Great Flood" to fall to the floor.

NAKED AMBITION Michelangelo painted 20 muscular men, the *ignudi*, whose bare bodies scandalized Pope Adrian VI. He wanted them painted over. They weren't.

SEERS AND AUGURS Bordering the chapel's ceiling are 12 figures who prophesied the coming of Christ. The seven men are Old Testament prophets. The five women are

pagan sibyls from ancient Greek and Roman mythology.

WITH A LITTLE SUPPORT Contrary to popular belief, Michelangelo did not paint his masterpiece flat on his back but was supported while leaning backward onto scaffolding he cleverly engineered.

QUORUM FORUM The Holy See still uses the chapel for work, most notably earlier this year when the cardinals met to elect Pope Francis.

CROWD CONTROL More than 350 figures are portrayed on the ceiling, including families with

children and angels and demons, some of them wearing the faces of Michelangelo's contemporaries.

GOD HEADS Michelangelo painted the Deity's face five times on the ceiling. In the "Last Judgment," he painted a beardless Christ who looks like the Greek god Apollo.

BEHIND THE PIGMENT After Michelangelo died, the Vatican ordered loincloths painted over the genitalia of the "Last Judgment" characters. During the 20th-century restoration, many were stripped away, revealing that one of the figures was actually a woman.

QUIZZABLE

Which of these is not a scene on the Sistine's ceiling?

- a) "Separation of Light and Darkness"
- b) "The Great Flood"
- c) "Martyrdom of St. Peter"

Answer: c)
Christ's disciple Peter is not found on the ceiling.

REVENGE OF THE ARTIST When Vatican functionary Biagio da Cesena complained of the nakedness in the "Last Judgment," Michelangelo painted Cesena as a demigod of the underworld, with donkey ears and a snake biting him in the crotch.

POPE SMOKE When smoke goes up the chapel chimney to signal the selection of the Holy Father, what makes it white? A likely suspect: potassium chlorate, which flames fast, lofting *fumo bianco* skyward.

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